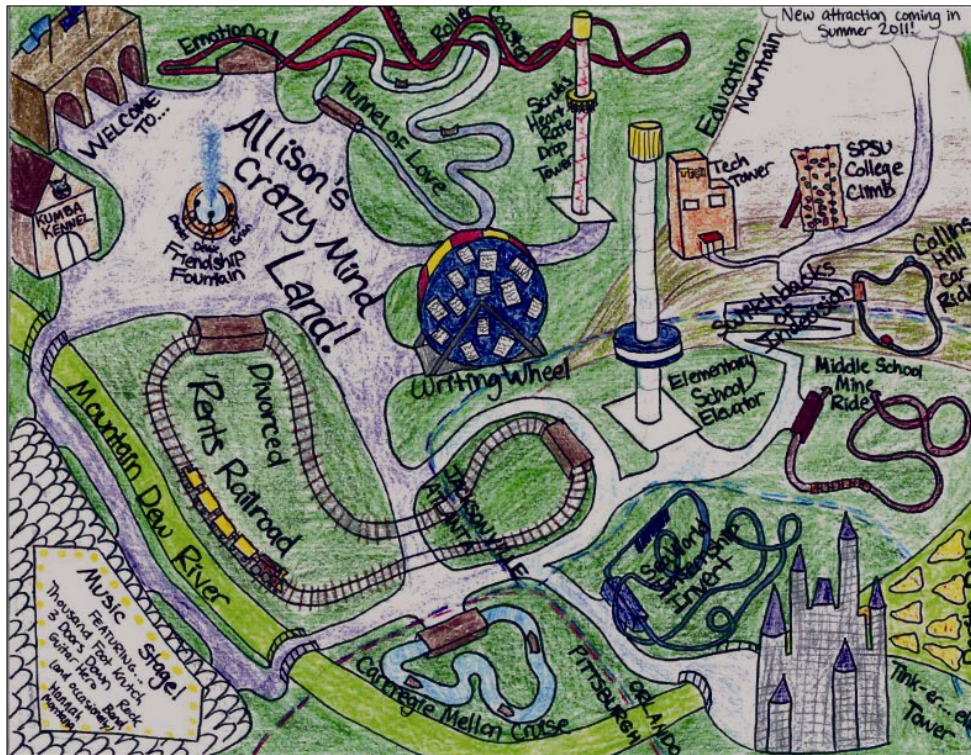


The Roller Coaster Ride of Divorce

By Allison Feldman



My life is kind of like the map of a theme park, but that may partially be because being a theme park enthusiast can really warp your mind and how you look at things. In this fantasy land based on real life, there's my own personal Tunnel of Love, traversing through the history of all my past relationships, playing like a movie showing all the good times and the bad times. The Tunnel of Love intertwines with the Emotional Roller Coaster, thanks to all of the ups and downs that relationships have to offer. (And let's not forget the Mountain Dew River, flowing throughout my map and constantly nourishing it.)

But the one attraction that sticks out in my mind, the one things that holds my entire map together and unifies it, is what I like to call the Divorced 'Rents Railroad. It's the ride that kept me going back and forth between two different homes all my life.

Sure, a lot of kids these days have to deal with the crappiness that divorce in their family can bring. Even though I'm pretty sure it's about the same as it is for thousands of other kids out there, sometimes I like to think my own perspective on it is just a little bit different.

My journey through the world of a divorced family started when I was five. That was a good fifteen years ago, and I was pretty young at the time, so I don't exactly remember any of it. I have no idea how I felt or how long it even took me to fully grasp the concept of what

was truly happening. My mom and dad were separating, and my dad would remain living in Atlanta while my mom, half-sister, and I moved back to Jacksonville, Florida.

It was kind of like when you're a kid on your first real roller coaster, not sure what to expect and scared out of your mind. You just want to hold on to your mom or dad and have them reassure you that it's all going to be okay.

For all my life, I never really knew why they divorced in the first place. At least, not until recently, when my dad and I were at dinner and I finally got the courage to ask the question I'd been wondering for fifteen years. "I'm not really too sure," he told me. "For some reason or another, it just didn't work out." While it wasn't an exciting tale, by any means, I was glad to know it wasn't because I was born or because of some other extreme situation. It just didn't work out.

So I lived in Jacksonville, just the three of us girls (with the exception of some boyfriends of my mom), for the next eight years. Thankfully, though, I was still able to see my dad often. He was the kind of dad who still wanted to be in his daughter's life, so he would drive the 400 miles a few times a year, get a hotel room for a couple of nights, then visit with me. I was especially excited to see him during Christmas time and my birthday, because being the naïve little child I was, I knew I would get a few extra presents out of it.

Even when we weren't together, we would write letters back and forth, some of which I just recently found. Rereading these brought tears to my eyes when I found them again.

"Allison – I just wanted to say HI! And tell you I LOVE YOU!! You're my little cabbage rose, right? I'll see you soon! Love, Daddy"

"Hi, sweetie! I sure am glad to hear that you like your new school so much! I think you would do really well no matter what school you are in. I sure am proud of you!! I love you always!"

The fact that some of these letters were dated as early as January, 1995, shortly after the divorce, still proves to me that he was determined to keep me happy despite everything else that was going on. He wanted to show me that he still loved me, no matter what the distance.

Growing up in Florida with a single parent was definitely interesting. On one hand, I remember thinking about how lucky I was that even though my parents were divorced, they both still loved me, cared for me, and overall just wanted me to be happy. But I also remember spending time with friends whose parents were still together, and being jealous about how both of their parents were there with them, all hours of the day, every day. I really wished I could see my dad that often, but I knew that that's just how life was, and that it wasn't the case.

As I got older, my parents thought I was mature enough to go up to Georgia with my dad and spend time with him there. Which I ended up loving, in part because of the pets that resided there as well, since the biggest pet I had in Jacksonville was a fish. There were two cats, Boo and Tabitha, and they became my best friends up there. There was also the fact that my dad let me sleep in his waterbed, which I thought was just the coolest thing.

But I still got homesick some of the time. Those were the times I really missed Jacksonville, and especially my Mommy.

Once my dad moved to a new apartment, I finally had my own room for whenever I went to visit him. It was a Rugrats themed room, which I was obsessed with at the time. It was really comforting to have my own little space filled with cartoons that I loved that my dad provided for me, even if I wasn't living in it all that often.

Throughout my childhood, I was raised by my dad's side of the family as a Georgia Tech girl. My grandfather graduated from the school with honors, and both my dad and uncle attended. So of course, I wanted to go as well. Since probably sixth grade or so, I wanted to go to Georgia Tech for architecture. When it came time for high school, I reasoned that if I attended a high school in Georgia, I could get the HOPE scholarship to help pay for Georgia Tech. (This rationale makes me seem so much more money conscious than I actually am, though.) At the same time, however, I was invited to the International Baccalaureate program at Stanton, named one of the best high schools in the nation.

You know how when you're in line for a big roller coaster, and you have to go back and forth and back and forth in the line while you're waiting in anticipation for the ride? It sure does give you time to really think about if you're sure you want to make that choice to ride the roller coaster, and that's exactly how I felt when deciding upon where to live and go to school.

I had a tough choice ahead of me, and it was one that my parents left totally up to me. It was one decision I felt way too young to be making on my own.

Living with my dad was a lot different than living with my mom and sister. He had just gotten remarried and moved into a new house, so I had a lot to look forward to. I was suddenly transformed from the youngest child to the only child. Suddenly, I didn't have an older sister around to hog the TV or to yell at me to get off the phone – I promise, now that we're older, she and I get along a lot better, as most siblings do – and it was just a huge weight off my shoulders.

Instead of a sister, though, I now had a stepmom in the house. That part was a little bit strange for me. I had an older woman in the house for me to look up to and to get advice from during those awkward teenage years, but she just wasn't my mom. I didn't have that same connection with her that I had with my own mom or even my dad. But living with my dad, the one person in my life I think I'm the closest to, was such a rewarding experience for me.

To this day, my dad tells me that my choosing to take that metaphorical train ride once more to live in Atlanta for high school was one of the best presents I have ever given him. He even wrote me a senior letter when I graduated (Collins Hill High School, Class of 2007!) saying how much happier he's been since we were living together, and how proud of me he was all through high school.

The funny part is, after moving up to Georgia with the intent of becoming a Yellow Jacket, I ended up not even going to Georgia Tech. And it's not because I didn't get accepted – I was so proud of myself when I got that acceptance letter. But, I ended up taking a

campus tour of my back-up school, and just fell in love with it, which explains why I am at Southern Poly instead.

It's amazing to think that such a non-physical idea such as divorce has even affected me even now that I'm in college. Being a writer, it's easy to see how different things in my life have influenced my style. I do a lot of creative writing in my spare time, and divorce tends to pop up a lot in my fiction stories. In my current work, the teenage girl lives with her single father, and the reason for the mother not being is just never discussed in their household. Even in things that I wrote in elementary school, I would put the main character as having only one parent, and never really had a back story as to why the other parent wasn't there. Since I've grown up living with single parents, I haven't known any other way of living, so that's how I always portray life in my stories.

It'd be nice to know if I could look into the future and make sure that whenever I get married, it won't end in divorce. I would never want to have my kids deal with that like I did, but it's just impossible to tell. No one ever can. It's made me very wary of my relationships now, and I'm always thinking to myself, "Is this the right person?" "Would I really be able to stay with them forever?"

Changes in your life can really affect you, there's no doubt about that. Whether it be your parents going through a divorce, or just a hobby you're really passionate about, it will affect you in some way. You just have to push through it and plan for that positive that will come at the end of it all.

Kind of like a really long line for a roller coaster. Sure, it sucks when you actually have to go through it, but once you get past it, life is just so much more fun.