

# The Last Last Ride

*by* Pete Domican

You'd stay on this small roller coaster ride all summer long if you could and if I were a rich man, I would let you. Is it fun riding around in circles? You're only nine; of course it's fun. Most things are fun when you're nine, except doing your homework, tidying your bedroom and going to bed when you're told! But going round in circles, that's real fun.

Another ride? OK. I'll take some more photos for your Mum. For me too, but I won't need to look at them. I'll remember this moment like it was yesterday.

Last year, you were losing your baby teeth; the Tooth Fairy had deep pockets. Now you have a beautiful wide smile. One baby tooth hangs on stubbornly but soon that will be gone and then that smile will be perfect. You're not a baby any more, except to your Mum. You'll always be her baby.

It's a quiet day and the operator lets you go round an extra couple of times. I've lost count now. You never grow tired of this ride. Your Mum can't understand the attraction but I understand much better than you think. I never grew tired of the ride when I was nine.

My ride was different; a fairground carousel in a Northern seaside town with beautiful carved wooden horses painted in garish colours taking part in an imaginary race. Each horse would pull ahead then fall behind whilst I clung on tightly to my charge, looking out for my mother and father. They stood together patiently as I sped by, going round in circles, smiling and waving at a happy little boy that would soon grow tired of such childish things, who wanted to grow up too fast. It was a lifetime ago but yesterday too. I wonder what they were thinking then? Now I'll never know.

Another ride? Last one, OK? And then we've really got to go.

At the end, you run straight past me towards your mother. She looks tired and distant but, as you approach, her face lights up as she listens to you, all breathless and excited. You grow more like her every day. You look to me for signs of weakness and plead for a 'last

last' ride. You pull a sad face then flash that smile, not sure which tactic will work best. You know I am the verge of giving in but I smile and shake my head.

It's time to leave. It's getting late and your Mum's tired, but the nine year old in me wants to say yes. I wish we could stay, that the ride could go on forever.

I wish for a ride when the world wasn't on my shoulders, when I didn't disappoint, when time didn't matter and going round in circles was just fun once again and not a punishment. I want that 'last last' ride too.

