**The Ride Of My Life**

Pre-set

*The audience is stood outside by a podium which says “Welcome to “The Ride of My Life”. Please wait for your ride attendant who will escort you to the ride*. *The Performer walks and we hear the music “The Call to Adventure*”

Me: Good afternoon everyone and I would like to welcome you to “The Ride Of My Life”. In a couple of moments, I will be seating you into your carriage but firstly, it is important to note that whilst the piece does contain true events that did occur, all the characters mentioned have been fictionalised for safety regulations and for your own entertainment. When boarding the carriage, please ensure that all loose articles such as bags, coats and even notebooks are placed into these lockers. Now, I ask for those who are priority pass members to come forward, so I can seat you in your carriage (*The performer gestures to the sheet below*). Please can these people come forward.

*Once the priority pass members are in the studio, the performer turns to the audience.*

Me: Ladies and gentlemen, please can you now form an orderly queue, so you can be seated in the carriage.

*The audience forms a queue and enters the studio. Once the sixteen seats are filled, the performer speaks*.

Me: Ladies and gentlemen, the carriage is now filled. Please can you now move to the seating area one either side of the studio sat down on the floor?

*The audience moves into the studio having heard the instructions from the performer.*

Scene 1

*The lights fade up. A whiteboard is seen at the side of the stage. The Performer walks to it.*

Me: Ronan Keating once said that life is a rollercoaster. It has its ups and its downs and whatever it brings, we must face it. Scary, huh? You see its weird. I mean my story in many ways was a rollercoaster. It never felt right. If anything, it felt like some sort of soap-opera. Just not with the death, affairs, elongated story lines, kidnappings – you get the idea. It was real. It was a rollercoaster that was hard to go through. It all started in 1999 when I was a toddler.

I was a late one you see. I enjoyed being cosy in my mum’s tummy. But with that came my first drop. When I was three, my mum started to realise that I had some problems. I was always a larger than life character. Hence why I got told off last week for being too loud in the library (*Pause*). Anyway, back when I was three, I was brought to the doctors to see whether I was ok. My mum at the time was working part time at a job she hated and had a larger than life son who sometimes needed to be controlled. When she brought me one day, she found I had been diagnosed with two conditions. ADHD and Worcester Draught Syndrome.

Now some people may not know about what this is and the truth is she didn’t either. I didn’t know. But the truth was I was just a kid. Essentially, it’s a sort of congenital suprabulbar paresis which is different for people. In my case, it was where the muscles in my mouth seized up and caused problems with my speech. Which would mean if I had it now then (*As I speak then, I try to speak the next line with the syndrome*) this is what I would sound like. (*Pause*)

Throughout this period, I would struggle to get words right and even words like “mummy”, it would come out as “Bo-ee”. My mum found this amusing. Not in a horrible manner. Just as something that she found a little funny that I would say. But, as time went on, she knew something was wrong and I needed help. I was getting attachment issues. She knew that something must be done. And so my ascent began.

*The sound of a lifthill chain is heard*. *The performer draws this hill*.

When I was six, she brought me to a primary school and got me sorted there in the hope that it would be the right school for me. It seemed nice. It had everything you wanted. Displays that were appealing, a range of nice and welcoming teachers and a friendly atmosphere. It made me feel like I would enjoy my time at school there. It seemed like I had hit the jackpot. Of all of the primary schools, it felt like Disneyland – the happiest place on Earth.

When I started school, I felt like I was in constant barrel rolls and loop the loops in meeting new people. Meeting friends for life. Friends that I would be able to engage with, make made up shows and laugh with. I’m not the sporty type as you can see. However, my first downhill would occur when my first assembly happened. The school were there. We were all piled into this one room as you were the groundlings at Shakespeare’s Globe and the chatter could be heard as the anticipation of the head mistress morning assembly was unnerving. As we waited, I could hear the distant noise of loud footsteps. It sounded like something out of *Matilda* as we heard her huffing and puffing down the hallway. As we waited, it became really silent and this thing, who looked not so uncanny to Maggie Thatcher, walked in. She turned round to the class with her stern voice and screamed “Good morning everyone”.

(*Audience: Good morning Ms. Arsehole!*”)

A drop.

*The performer puts on the wig and becomes Mrs Arsehole*

Me (*As Mrs Arsehole*): Now, today we have a new student. So I want you to be *really* nice to him and show him how we behave. Now, whats your name?

*The Performer takes the mask off.*

Me: I’m D-d-d-aniel

Ms Arsehole: Well hello there Daniel. And what year are you in?

Me: I’m in Year 3. I mean 1.

Ms Arsehole: Well I’m sure you’ll enjoy our time here. Now, how do we behave in this school? Yes.

V/O: We sit here and laugh about how you are called “Ms Arsehole”

*The V/O laughs and the school laughs and starts singing “MS ARSEHOLE IS A FARTER”*

Mrs Arsehole (*Exploding*): QUIET! That is not what we do. You sit here cross legged and do what I say. Is that clear! (*Silence*)

*The performer takes his mask off and places the mask on the automaton*.

Me: After I had that assembly, I remember thinking “Gosh, is that woman insane and need locking up?”. Like she had shouted at a school in-front of infants thinking it was right to do so. Even worse, she had decided to embarrass me in the assembly with that tone thinking it was right to do so when, it was as if she was trying to recreate an embarrassing photo on a ride. (*The Performer shows an embarrassing one*). As time went on, I decided to brush it off and get on with it. Besides, it was the best thing to do. Yet, as I carried on with school life, I started to realise that people were treating me as weird. Don’t get me wrong, I was ok and I had a couple of friends. Well, maybe ten or so… Or maybe my entire class. But, something was weird. The teachers treated me as different and not in the right way. It was as if I was some sort of dog and one that they would be controlling in all the wrong ways. It was as if whatever I did, I was always bigger and larger than life and not “normal”. As I went through these corkscrews that life brought me, the teachers made me feel like an outsider. Different. When my mum and dad started to notice there was something wrong, it was time for them to step in and face Mrs Arsehole.

Obviously, I had no idea of what was mentioned in those meetings. But what I do know is this. My mum and dad realised that I was not progressing and needed speech therapy. However, Mrs Arsehole had a different agenda. She didn’t care about me or that I was ok. She was more bothered about her own ego being the schools head and trying to cause halts on my ride.

V/O. As parents of Daniel, I can assure you that there is nothing wrong. In fact, it is not our fault as a school for his behaviour. If anything, it is his own and I would question you, Mrs Fotheringham, on how you brought him up. He is a liability to the school and his own self. It is not our own doing but only his.

When my mum heard that, it was as if The Incredible Hulk had arrived. I don’t know what she did but what I can do right now is give you a physicalized interpretation of her reaction.

*The performer turns around and puts on some Incredible Hulk hands and roars. He rips off the wig and slams it on the floor and punches it and roars.*

Me: There we are. After those interesting comments, my mum decided to contact a GP to help me in getting my speech therapy. In the end, we got a doctor onboard who was prepared to fully back me and help my mum and dad. It was at this point that Mrs Arsehole started assembling her team to assure that she could stop me. Purposefully trying to obstruct my own ride, she decided to do anything she could to stop us in making claims about my behaviour and that I did not need speech therapy. If anything, she made it out I was uncontrollable to teach. A monster. I didn’t know what to think. I felt so excluded that she made me feel I myself was going insane. And then, a victory.

After countless hours of work, stress and sheer determination, I had defeated her for now. We got the therapy and at eight years old, we began launching into the stratosphere of my ride. The work had started.

When I won that battle, we then went into consultation with a therapist. Their name was called Danni. Like me. When Danni began work with me, this person work so hard and with all the breakdowns I had, not once did they lose their temper. I was a hard cookie you see. Those who know me know I am a slow learner and this was a prime example. I spent countless hours going over small phrases and even tongue twisters like “How much wood would woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood” and words with a “th” sound. No. Not “F”. “Th”. I still struggle with it today.

As we continued our sessions, I remember feeling better as if I was going in loops and as if I was progressing. However, skip a couple of years and I would say something different. It was year six. The year everyone feared and the one final lifthill before we would progress from becoming “mummy and daddy’s little soldiers” to independent kids. It was the hardest lifthill of them all. Choosing my secondary school. When I was at school, I was faced with the prospect of where to go next. To many, they found it as an easy choice. Pick the closest school they could find and pay 30p on the bus to get there. They didn’t care if they found it shit. They only cared about that. To me though, picking the right school was a priority. I wanted somewhere where I could come in every day feeling happy. I wanted to feel accepted.

When searching for schools, my parents found one that they felt was right. It was called “Kingstone High” – a school that was focused on the performing arts. At the time, it was the right one for me. I wanted to be an actor at that point. I had dreams of playing “The Phantom of the Opera” onstage and my friends sitting on the front row as they saw the chandelier dramatically and the candelabras rise from the stage. So even though my friends were going to a different school and I would be studying at the other side of Barnsley, surely they would have been supportive of my move.

*Silence*. *The performer places the photographs down.*

One by one, my friends treated me as a ghost. They wanted nothing to do with me and started creating their own friendships. It was as if I had said possibly the most offensive thing of all time and I felt so excluded that I didn’t know what to do. It was the most horrible thing seeing my friends turn around and say nothing to me. There were no more made up plays. No more going round to their house and playing on their Xbox. No more anything.

My mum found out and immediately tried to contact people on why this had happened. I felt so isolated and felt like I did something wrong. In the end, my mum had one last port of call to sort it out. Unfortunately, this person had intentions that would hurt me even more.

*The Performer becomes Mrs Arsehole.*

Mrs Arsehole: Now everyone, I want to talk about being friends. Now why do you think they are important? Yes.

V/O: Cos they should be people who stick by you?

Mrs Arsehole: Exactly! Now the reason I’m talking about this is because Daniel claims he has *no* friends. *So*, I want you to be *really* nice to him and make friends with him. I know he’s been here a long time and that you know him but if we all *try* to get along with him then maybe he may make some new friends.

*The performer takes the wig off*.

Me: When she did that assembly, I had never wanted to cry so much. She had such a tight grip on me not only was I in pain but I could see my class looking at me sniggering and laughing that my mum had to go to this extreme. I wanted her to let go but every time I struggled, her grip got harder and harder. When she let me go, I ran as fast as I could to the toilets trying to contain myself. I could feel my lip quivering so much it was embarrassing. It was so bad that I nearly threw up. On the aftermath, it was only me going on my ride and no one else.

When I secured my place at Kingstone, I cut these guys out of my life. To be honest, I genuinely did not care about them anymore. If they were to do that to me then that is also what I would do. To get into a good set at my school, I had to get level fours in my SATs in English, Maths and Science. Now, I wasn’t amazing when it came to those subjects. My results – level twos. I’d be lucky if I got a level three. The reality is I was not a clever kid. If anything, I’m surprised I’ve got through this degree.

When I found out the requirements, I was dead set to get level fours. Not because I was clever enough to get them but because I *wanted* to get them. I was determined to succeed. But, particularly, I wanted to get a level four in maths. The reason – cos I’m bloody terrible at it. I still don’t understand half the things I learnt in that subject. When I told my mum what I wanted to do, she said that she would do everything that she could to help me. She had fought and won her first battle. She was ready to take on the next. It was just a shame that Mrs Arsehole wasn’t as supportive. In fact, I think I remember this time what she said. It was something along the lines as this.

Mrs Arsehole (*In hysterics*): Oh god, you are so funny sometimes Daniel. Level 4’s? Since when have you even achieved one? Honestly, I admire your bravery and I wish you the best of luck but there is no way you will achieve that. Perhaps you should aim towards a lower grade like level 3’s?

Me: I had been through many battles with her, but this was one ride I was willing to instigate. I walked out of her room and immediately set out a plan with my mum to get practice books that would prepare me for my SAT’s. I worked tirelessly and that included with doing stuff like stage school at the weekend and even trying to have a bit of a social life. Well, that depends on what you would call a social life. I worked tirelessly having breakdowns of stress and bashing my head against the books when looking about what the meaning of “x” and even trying to work out the first nine digits of pi. But, I was so determined. I worked tirelessly revising as if in that one hour exam, I would be going on a ride called “Maths Exam – The Ride!”. I did so many timed exams it was beyond belief and whilst it was a slow process, I was getting better each time as they went on. Then came the day of the exam. I hear the teacher turn around and say the rules. It was as if everything started going into slow motion as if I was locked into my seat by some seatbelt and there is no turning back. Not unless I wanted to prove to Mrs Arsehole that she was right. There’s sudden silence. Then…

V/O: Year 6, if you could open your paper. The exam has now begun.

*The sound of the lift hill is heard once more.*

Me: I look at the paper trying to find a way to negotiate through it. There’s hundreds of questions. Or at least what seems like that. I try to think of tactics. Do I answer the easy ones first or do it the other way round? Or, do I basically do like a madman? I think that ones the best so I’ll do it. As I’m writing it, I’m wondering how prepared I am as I feel like I am going upside at every moment on this ride. In the space of 40 minutes, I have finished the paper. Looking at the marks again, I revise some answers thoroughly checking everything is right and not wrong. But, I don’t feel confident handing it to my marker. People glance at me as I’m checking that I’m satisfied with it. They look and sneer at me as if I’ve done something wrong. Shaking my head, I turn to the paper. Next, I hear the teacher stand up and walk to the front of the classroom.

“Times up.” She bellows and I relax as I feel this hour long exam is over. I turn to the other people looking to gauge a reaction on how they did. They don’t bother looking at me and as I get out of my seat, retrieving my bag and phone which had been at the side of the classroom the whole time to ensure no one cheated, I take a breath of air and relax as this ride is over. I remember thinking at the time that whilst I didn’t know what I would get, I was sure that I did well. If anything, I thought I did the best exam of all time. I was just hoping I could prove Mrs Arsehole wrong and do my own version of a mic drop.

Two weeks pass. We were all told our results would be sent to our house in the post to avoid any rude behaviour and that no one would get upset. As I came home each day, I waited patiently at the letterbox hoping it would arrive. Hoping that my result would prove her wrong. Nothing would come until one day when it was already there when I came home. I rushed to get it hoping that it would be a saviour and opened the letter.

*The performer holds up a letter addressed to him. He opens it and reads it.*

Me (*Shock*): Oh my god. I did it. I actually did it. A 4C in Science and two 4A’s in Maths and English. The highest grade you could get in the level fours. My god I don’t know what to say… I was one of the highest graded students in my class. I had worked tirelessly and so hard in hoping there would be an end result. Its true when they say that those who work hard will reap the rewards and my reward was seeing the smile wiped off Mrs Arsehole. I had gone through many loop the loops, corkscrews and even launches and in the end, whilst I knew the ride had come to an end, I had won. I was the victor and Mrs Arsehole knew she had failed miserably. The last time I saw her was on the final day of school when she asked whether I would remember them. Now I don’t remember much what I do remember was these following words.

Me: “Of *course* I’ll remember you. I’ll remember you for all the pain you brought me through. The battles I had to fight against you. I’ll remember that you made my five years of school hell. But most of all, I’ll remember how you was a bully and pure evil to me. I’ll remember you so much that I can’t wait for you to retire. I’ll remember this school for the wrong reason. Auf Wiedersehen Mrs Arsehole.”

Me: So that’s the ride of my life but that’s a ride of my life that happened ten years ago. Ten years now, where am I? Well, ten years ago, I was at the end of the first part of my education. Now, I’m actually at the end of my education in which graduation is in sight and I’m ready to face the real world. Ten years, Mrs Arsehole left my life as I went to secondary school. Now, she retired over a year ago in which the local newspaper regarded her as an “outstanding” teacher. I also am proud to say that in year seven, after years of hard work, I was clear of my speech therapy and have been clear of it for nine years now. Sure, I have a lisp but that is the only thing that sticks with me. But, ten years ago, I lost “lifelong” friends. Now, I have friends for life not just at secondary school but at uni. Friends who after uni is done, I will keep in contact and do anything for them. Hell, if I had to die for them then I would.

So in many ways, Ronan Keating was right. My life was like a rollercoaster. I went through many ups and downs. So big that I didn’t know how I would end up on the other side. My rollercoaster brought pain, hurt and challenges. And in the end, I came out with a victory and one that has shaped me for who I am now. So in many ways, life is like a rollercoaster. It has its ups and downs. But in the end, it is your choice to either scream and face that life isn’t happening or let life take you and enjoy the ride.

*The performer walks to the rostrum and sits on his own seat. A projection of POV on rollercoasters are seen with the song “Life is a Rollercoaster” by Ronan Keating is heard and he puts his hands up as if on the ride. Blackout.*