

Dancing Dinosaurs

Sean Casey

“My mommy is in adult films!” blurted out four year old Spencer.

This was hardly the answer my brother or I had expected from Group 1, the youngest of the campers at Sierra Canyon Day Camp. Spencer was just excited to answer our question of “Who knows anyone in movies?” So what did we expect from such a question, especially in the Adult film capital of the world, Chatsworth, California?

Days started like this everyday in Movie Magic. Movie Magic is just a title they gave our program when we arrived. My brother Tim and I ran a program based on movies to kids 3-14 years old. Tim is my height, and had a part down the middle of his hair that made his hair lap down in waves on either side of his round face. When he smiled it was like Bruce in *Finding Nemo*, his face would disappear and all you would see were his pearly white teeth. “An Actor’s smile”, he would always say. In Movie Magic we made movies with the kids, put them in movies of their choice, asked trivia, produced sound effects, created visual and special effects, and the most popular activity-- making movies with toys. Movie Magic itself was a land of total and complete wonderment for a kid. A red carpet lined your way into the room; the walls were covered from head to toe in different movie posters. Star Wars space ships were hanging from the ceiling in an epic battle, and more than ten television sets were all around running clips of different movies. Then there was the unmistakable green screen surrounded by lights and tripods. But the room was just a set. My brother and I were the actors. Every week we

had to take on new personalities. From “Soundasaurus” to “Dance-o-matic”, our created personalities would teach about whatever topic we had chosen for the week.

This week, Superhero Week, Tim and I had dressed up as the Blue and Pink Power Rangers. It was four days into week eight of our nine-week summer and needless to say, I was beat from having to be as energetic as the Genie when he was set free in *Aladdin*. At this point in the summer, the Santa Ana winds brought in temperatures of 100° to 110° everyday and the heat just added to my lethargy. Everything moves in slow motion in the heat. The clock, the birds, the carpool line, and the squirrels would all rather take their time. The only thing that keeps running at 110% are the kids. Hell hath thrown all of its fury into the summer air and still the kids were running and tackling their counselors, climbing on trees, and throwing water on each other.

My Power Ranger costume was not something I wanted to be wearing at this point. It was spandex. It clung to my skin like a child clings to a parent on the first day of camp. The helmet was five times the size of a normal head and trapped my hot breath in it. This plus the heat outside made me sweat right through my outfit. Nevertheless, I got the energy up to welcome Group 1. As Tim threw questions out around the room like popcorn, I got the costumes ready for today’s production of a superhero movie starring the campers. As I struggled to get the Superman cape from under the box, I felt it.

It’s impossible to tell how bad an earthquake is going to be. They always start the same. It’s like a wave. The floor feels as though it’s rolling. There’s a slow rumble that you hear before you start feeling anything; a low baritone that you do not hear in your ears but feel in your stomach. Then it starts shaking. Your heart races. Everything slows down. You feel each rumble separately. It freezes you in your place. Everything you

were ever taught as to how to protect yourself is thrown out the window. You just wait. Wondering if this is the big one everyone talks about. Things start to fall off the wall. The lights blink. From this moment it can go one of two ways: it can either keep going and get worse, or taper off and calm down.

When I was about four, the Northridge Earthquake shook Los Angeles. I can remember the night as if I'm still there. I awoke under a two-foot pile of board games and pieces. The neatly stacked games that were home based in the shelves above my bed had cascaded on top of me. I couldn't figure out what was going on. Why were there games on me? Did Tim and Kevin bury me while I was asleep? I was confused. Then my Mom came barreling into the room. She broke down the door and stood there like a fireman who was bracing himself for the building to fall down. When I looked to see my mothers beautiful, sapphire eyes, I could not see any blue. There was just blackness; there was just fear. That's when I knew this wasn't a game, that this was for real, and that's when I started to cry.

Standing there in Movie Magic I could tell this earthquake wasn't the big one, or even as large as the Northridge one, but it was still pretty sizeable. The quake was a 5.2, only a point and a half smaller than the 1994 Northridge Earthquake. To me, it didn't seem very big at all. I was successfully immune to anything below a 6 on the Richter Scale since my experience when I was four. But then I looked down at those energetic campers who had been so eager to share things about themselves that probably should not have been said, only to see them frozen. They were caught in thought and confusion. I looked at their counselor Lauren. Her burnt cheeks had faded to a dull white like all of the life had been sucked out of her. Her eyes were eerily familiar. Filled with only

blackness gripping onto nothing but the same fear I had seen in my mother's eyes. The campers turned to her for answers. But through her they could tell something was wrong, and one by one they began to cry.

When my mother gathered me up and flew down the stairs, the freeze of the moment was gone. Everything moved a million miles per hour. We spent a short stint under the solid maple wood table that had gothic legs that showed their strength against the broken glass surrounding it until the shaking stopped. My father led us outside into the safety of the street. That's when my father looked at us and said, "Boy I do hate it when the dinosaurs have a dance party". A smile cracked through my wet face. I knew it was okay.

The memory shot into my mind. I looked down at the kids, then back at Tim and said, "Tim, don't you hate it when our Dinosaurs have a dance party and don't invite us?"

"Ugh! Soundasaurus! Come on guys let's go and dance!" Tim responded with excitement and an actors smile.

Fully clad in our Power-Rangers suits we grabbed our boom-box and turned on Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers. Slyly we led the group out onto the safety of the field. The only thought on the campers' minds at this point was where the dance party was going to be. As we arrived on the field the atmosphere was hardly warm and welcoming. Our group of dancing Power Rangers and four year olds cracked the silence. The older campers looked over to see ear-to-ear smiles on the youngest campers faces, as well as the awkward dance moves that their counselors were joining in. Campers can be funny at times. They do not want to seem young, they always want to be older than they are. They couldn't stand being scared when the youngest of them were not afraid. Quickly,

they all jumped up and joined in the dance party. By the time the first aftershock hit, no one felt it because everyone was dancing.

When we got home, we told my father the whole story. He smiled through his grizzly white beard, and said, “See boys, your pop is pretty good!”

We used to always roll our eyes at my dad’s advice. It always seemed to be stupid or just plain crazy. But I guess I should listen to more of my father’s wisdom in the future. Who knows when it’s going to come in handy?