

It's a Small Judgment After All

By Reg P. Wydeven
April 10, 2013

I can't believe it's almost been a year since our awesome family trip to Disney World. To commemorate the vacation, my sister gave us all photo albums with tons of awesome pictures and hilarious captions in them.

There are shots of all of us standing in front of our favorite rides: me in front of The Haunted Mansion; my dad in front of Soarin'; my son in front of Star Tours; and my mom in front of It's a Small World.

We rode It's a Small World several times, because it is a classic ride and the wait was typically pretty short. We showed our kids the ride's portrayal of our ethnic heritage: the French kids playing by the Eiffel Tower, the German kids wearing lederhosen, and, of course, the Dutch kids hanging out by windmills.

All the while we're checking out our ancestry, we are serenaded by the animatronic children who sing It's a Small World. Repeatedly. Endlessly. The first few times on the ride, the tune is adorable and catchy. The last few times it pierces your skull like nails on a chalkboard.

Disney World is purportedly the happiest place on earth. Being stuck listening to It's a Small World on a continuous loop, however, may tarnish that title. In fact, it actually constitutes pain and suffering.

Just ask Jose Martinez. On the day after Thanksgiving in 2009, Martinez and his wife visited Disneyland. Because he is paralyzed and needs a wheelchair, Martinez received assistance from park employees to board It's a Small World. The ride broke down, however, when the couple was in the "Goodbye Room." They were stuck on the ride for between 30 and 40 minutes while the ride's title song blasted overhead in a loop. Black Friday indeed.

While other passengers were helped to disembark, employees told Martinez they could not help him. Instead of calling in firefighters to evacuate him, park officials elected to wait until the ride was fixed before helping Martinez off. He was then treated at a Disneyland first aid station.

As a result, Martinez sued Disneyland, claiming the park violated federal and state laws for being unable to evacuate disabled guests in the event of an emergency. The lawsuit, filed by The Disability Rights Legal Center, sought policy changes in the park and unspecified damages. Martinez hopes no other disabled visitors go through what he did. "This is Disneyland, for crying out loud," he said.

David Geffen, Martinez's attorney, claims that his client suffers from panic attacks and high blood pressure, both of which were aggravated as he was stuck on the ride. He also suffered from dysreflexia, a condition experienced by those with spinal cord injuries caused by stress and overstimulation. Dysreflexia can lead to a stroke or death.

According to the L.A. Times, the court awarded Martinez \$4,000 for pain and suffering and \$4,000 for other disability access violations.

Ironically, as Martinez exited the courtroom victoriously, a reporter asked him what he was going to do to celebrate, and he yelled, "I'm going to Disneyland!"

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