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The Editor-in-Chief
Australian Women's Weekly
GPO Box 4178
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Dear Ms Doherty

**Re Article in March Edition of AWW
Is it safe to go back to our theme parks?**

While I am not normally a reader of AWW, this article was brought to my attention by others, who are involved in the amusement ride industry.

This article is headed [Investigation] but I consider the word investigation should have been preceded by a few adjectives like "shallow", "limited", "biased" and perhaps even "misleading" to give a more accurate description, up-front, of what your journalist/contributor had actually done and was offering to your readers.

It is pleasing to see your magazine taking an interest in the safety of amusement rides, whether in theme parks or the travelling variety, as so many in the industry really work very hard to establish and maintain safe design, safe erection and safe operation of rides in both environments. But in taking this interest, would it not be better to have a more balanced approach and to recognise, or even mention, the positive steps that have been taken in Standards and Government Regulations to encourage and enforce a higher level of safety across the industry?

There is one statement in the article that I wholeheartedly agree with; that is the final sentence "There should be zero deaths". From my contact with ride operators and manufacturers across Australia, and overseas, I am quite sure that they also would all endorse that statement. Equally, if you were to ask operators of airlines, bus companies, or any other means of mass transit, they would also agree that there should be zero deaths in their industry.

Unfortunately, we live in a world where accidental deaths happen, despite the best attempts to prevent them. These accidental deaths are not limited to amusement rides, but occur in almost any area where there are people; workplaces, motor vehicles, and even among pedestrians walking down the street. There is no such thing as zero risk despite our efforts to minimise risk.

Your journalist/contributor has titled her article “theme parks” but in the middle of page 51 lists only 2 theme park incidents that resulted in deaths; one in 1979 and one in 2014. I assume that she is in the process of “investigating” other industries that have had 35 years with no deaths so that she can present a follow-up article on how unsafe those industries are?

She includes in her list of “thrill ride tragedies” a number of other amusement ride incidents, that did not occur at theme parks, but serve only to pad out her list of tragedies, presumably to try to convey a misleading impression to non-discerning readers. She fails to address the fact that from March 2001 until September 2014, a period of more than 13 years, there were not any, repeat **not any**, fatalities on the hundreds of amusement rides that travel all over Australia.

These rides are erected and operated at Capital city shows, regional shows, school fetes, street festivals and numerous other events where people gather for fun and enjoyment. These rides are mainly operated by family groups who have a long tradition of providing safe fun and amusement to Australian communities. Does your journalist/contributor give them any bouquets? Not likely, because that sort of compliment doesn’t meet her bias that wants to ‘prove’ theme parks are unsafe.

Apparently she also wants to blame the theme park because “another guest fell into the water after standing up on a log ride”. Well, as that guest was supposed to stay seated [instructions? / signage? / common sense?], who is really to blame if he/she decides to stand up and then falls into the water? There is such a concept as rider responsibility, which your journalist/contributor doesn’t bother to mention. Again, because it doesn’t fit with the bias of the article?

Then there is her statement at the end of the third paragraph on page 50, “The safety record at (sic) rides at fetes and fairs is even more concerning”. This is a bald, unsubstantiated statement that is quite simply wrong and can be shown to be wrong with very little “investigation”. But presumably, it is not “investigated” and substantiated because to do so would undermine the writer’s bias and destroy the tenor of her article.

We read at length about *name removed*’s opinions. **** who? Apart from being an 18 year old in 2016, who prior to that was a ‘multi-pass theme park tragic’, we know nothing about him, but his opinion is quoted as though he is an authority on theme park rides. What are his credentials for being able to assess the operation and maintenance of rides and to make statements like “The Green Lantern is always getting stuck”? Always?

Three instances, over two years, are cited, but how many times in that two year period did it go round the track and NOT get stuck? We aren’t told as that doesn’t meet the bias of the journalist/contributor, and as part of her limited “investigation” she didn’t bother to find out.

The inclusion of Adelaide Show, Wet’n’Wild and other incidents, unidentified in the article, that are not related to theme parks makes the headline misleading. Those incidents that did not happen in theme parks ought not to be included in an article that is ostensibly about theme park safety. Or if those incidents are to be included, then the title of the article and the scope of the investigation needed to be widened and that investigation needed to be carried out more thoroughly, diligently and honestly to present a fair picture of the whole industry.

The most glaring omission from the article is the complete absence of any reference to Australian Standards [specifically the AS3533 series] that deal with the design, construction, operation, maintenance and inspection of all amusement rides. Perhaps the “investigation” by your journalist/contributor was so shallow and limited that she was not even aware that such Standards exist. Nor was she probably aware that Regulators from all States, industry representatives and other technically competent people contribute their time and expertise, in a voluntary capacity, to discuss and decide on the best design, operational and inspection methods and formulate standards, that are often ahead of the rest of the world, to guide the industry in the safe operation of rides.

To call an article that cherry-picks incidents, to suit the bias of the writer, an “investigation” is really quite sloppy on the part of the writer.

For the AWW to publish such a sloppy article is pretty sad. I think your readers would expect a higher standard from your magazine. Or, then again, maybe not?

By the way, your journalist/contributor missed a fatality that occurred at Townsville Show in July 2000. I mention it so that you may have a complete picture of amusement ride fatalities since 1979, ie 15 in 37 years.

Now I acknowledge that that is 15 deaths too many and I acknowledge that each one was a cause of huge grief for the families involved. Nobody wants to see a friend or family member killed in an accident and it is right that we feel sympathy and concern for those who suffer as a result of accidental death, wherever it may occur.

But an article on amusement ride safety that fails to address the knowledge of the industry and the significant changes that have been implemented over the years, by re-writing of Standards, by the issue of Safety Alerts from Regulators, by operators going ‘the second mile’ in implementing safety procedures, all to improve ride safety and rider safety [with many of these changes being at the instigation of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland], can only, in my opinion, be classified as shallow, biased, limited and misleading journalism.

Yours faithfully

Brian Bradley BE MIEAust CPEng RPEQ