



Ring of Horses

by
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You hand the man your ticket. The round platform rocks slightly as you step up onto it. Spying your favorite mighty steed, you rush toward it, weaving your way past the other horses. As you scramble into the sky-blue saddle, the bouncy cadence of the organ makes you smile. You hold on tightly to the shiny gold pole in front of you as your horse begins to move up and down, round and round. The world whirls around you, the horse galloping through it. What a wonderful ride!

You've probably ridden a carousel at least once, maybe many times. Did you ever wonder who decided to make pretend horses spin in a circle with people riding them?

I'VE LOST MY
STEED,
MY LIVELY HORSE,
ROCINANTE!



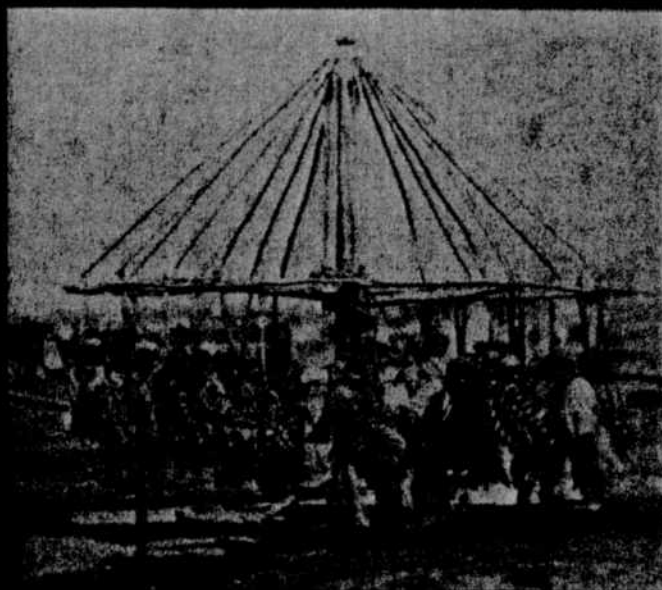
I CAN STILL
HEAR THE
CADENCE,
RHYTHMS
OF HIS POLE
GALLOPING
ACROSS THE
PAGES...

PA NASH PA NASH PA NASH

The origins of the carousel can be traced all the way back to games played on horseback by Arabian and Turkish men in the 1100s. In one game riders played catch with clay balls filled with scented oil or water. In another the men held a lance while riding and tried to run it through a small ring dangling by ribbons from a tree or pole. If a rider was successful, the ribbons would pull off the tree and stream behind the ring on his lance like a waving rainbow.

Hundreds of years later, Italian and Spanish travelers observed these games and brought them to Europe. The contests were called *garosello* by the Italians and *carosella* by the Spanish. Both words mean "little war." The English word carousel comes from those words.

The first carousel-like contraption was created in France and was designed to help men practice for their "little war" games. It didn't look as fancy as the carousels you see today, but the structure was



Children ride an early carousel.

similar. The umbrella-like construction had a wooden pole with spokes radiating from the top. Chains hanging from the spokes held carved wooden horses. Men, real horses, or mules turned the center pole while riders practiced putting their lances through a brass ring hanging to one side.



ALL IS NOT
LOST...



BOUNCE

YOU STILL HAVE
YOUR LANCE,
THAT WEAPON
MADE OF A LONG,
THIN HANDLE
AND A SHARP
STEEL HEAD...



Elegantly-dressed adults enjoy the ride in this drawing from the late 1800s.

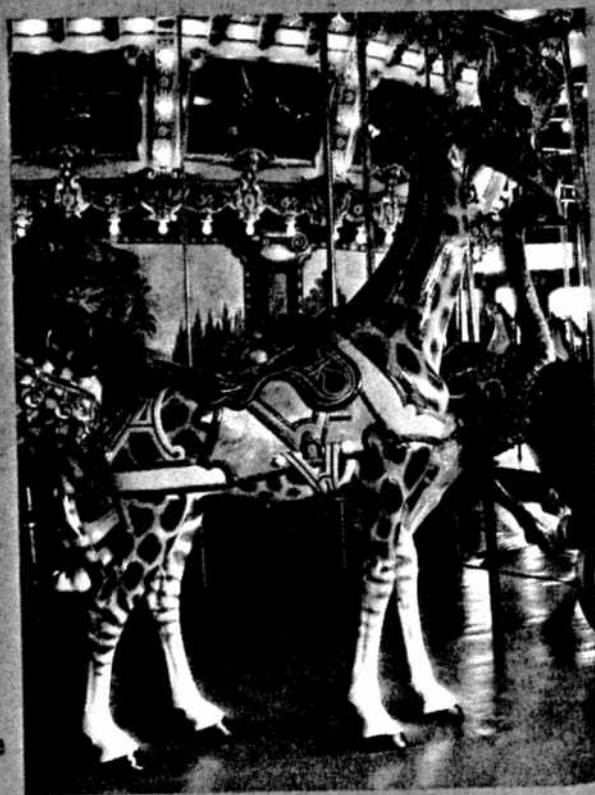
Carousel by Camille Pissarro, ca. 1885, pastel on paper mounted on board, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, Bequest of A. Conger Goodyear, 1996.



In the late 1700s carousels like the ones we know today began to appear throughout Europe. Rather than being used for training, these were enjoyed for the sheer thrill of the ride. In the beginning the carousel was ridden mostly by grown-ups, not children. Light and small, these first carousels were designed to be easily spun by man or mule.

Gustav Dentzel began building the first carousels in America in the 1860s. Powered by steam engines, these carousels moved faster and held more weight than the old model,

allowing for a more lavishly decorated machine. Dentzel's company is famous for having carved and



This Dentzel giraffe and other carousel animals with all four feet planted on the platform are called "standers."

painted a variety of animals for his carousels, including cats, lions, ostriches, pigs, rabbits, and even a kangaroo! For those who could not or did not want to straddle a horse or other animal, he created handsome chariots.

Remember the game of tilting a lance through a brass ring? The early carousel designers had this game in mind when they hung brass rings on a wooden arm next to many of their carousels. As the carousel turned, riders would try to grab the ring; if they succeeded, they won a free ride. Today you'd be lucky to find a carousel with a brass ring arm—only a handful in the United States still feature them.

Carousels were so popular that nearly 4,000 were built from 1860 to 1930. But when hard times came upon America during the Great Depression in the 1930s, few people had money to spend on extras. Many carousels stopped being used and fell into disrepair, and no one could afford to fix them. Some were even taken apart and put into storage.



"Jumpers" are animals that have all four feet in the air, like this Dentzel cat.



This girl reaches for a ring at one of the few places where you can still try your hand at this game, the Oak Bluffs Flying Horses Carousel in Massachusetts.