

# I Pitched a Roller Coaster to Disneyland at Age 10 in 1978

BY KEVIN GLIKMANN

In 1978, for my 10th birthday, I went to Disneyland and got to ride a new roller coaster called *Space Mountain*. It figuratively and literally took my breath away. I loved every second of it and that night, I couldn't fall asleep; I just kept thinking about how exhilarating it was. Then, a wild thought suddenly hit me: *Why isn't there a roller coaster that goes upside down?*

At first, I was like that's crazy, it can't work. But then I remembered *Spin Out*, the ride with a round room that spun so fast I stuck to the wall. If that worked, why not a loop on a roller coaster? I thought that would feel and be like the same thing. I was convinced!

I finally fell asleep dreaming of my roller coaster, full of twists, turns, and loops.

A few days later, I told my best friend Daschle. He was older, knew everything, and lived next door. "Buddy," he said, "I've got exciting but crushing news. Your idea works."

"Really?"

"Yep. I saw it. They're building one at Magic Mountain. It's called the Revolution. Sorry, Buddy."

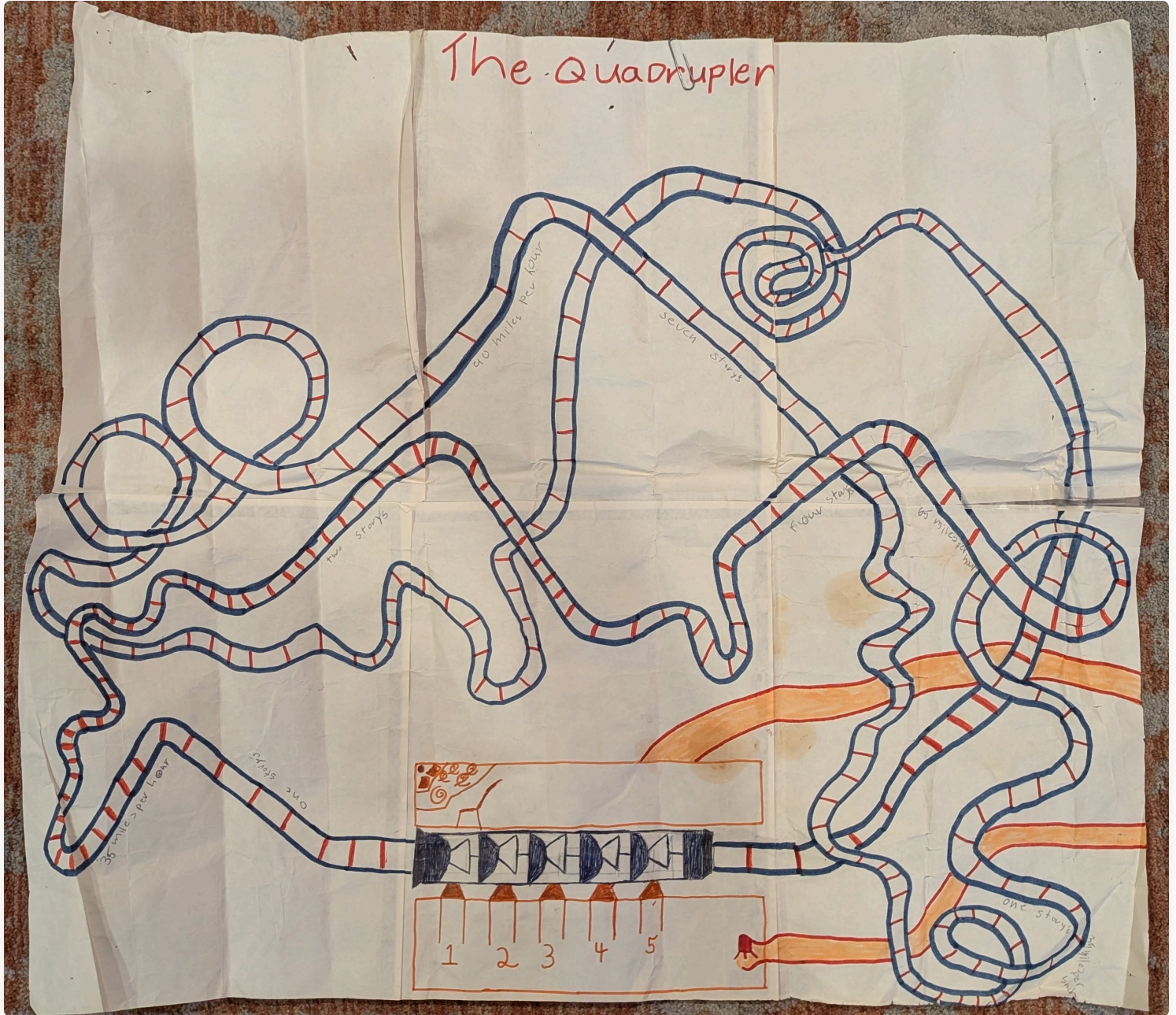
But I wasn't crushed, I was thrilled! What I knew could work was really happening.

"How many loops does it have?" I asked.

"One."

"Ha! Mine has four. It's called the *Quadrupuler*! It's gonna be way better!"

That night I taped six sheets of paper together and drew my blueprints in colored markers. As you can see from the photo it was glorious!



Look closely, I didn't label those coaster hills in feet or meters, no sir, I used building "story's" for height, and the speed at each section in miles per hour. I'm 10. I'm serious here.

With guiding blueprints, it was time to build the model.

I got a Styrofoam board and balsa wood. Cutting and gluing each tiny cross tie was slow, and with all my homework, I could only work on weekends. So I calculated how many inches I could finish in a week. The answer turned out to be something like 5 months! After that I considered

just giving up because I realized that I was only 120 months old and this was going to take 5% of my life! Plus, I still hadn't figured out how to make the loops, balsa wood doesn't bend like that. But I told myself: **one piece at a time**. That became my motto.

When I got to the first loop, I had to stop and think. What in the world could I make the loop out of? A lot of 10-year-old brain power went into imagining what simple material I could use. Then one morning, I had it: heat plastic strips over the stovetop flame and bend them as they cooled. The key? Don't burn the house down.

I'd learned that the hard way a year earlier, when Daschle convinced me we should recreate the movie *The Towering Inferno*, with a cardboard box under his house... and real fire. It got out of control so fast, the flames started hitting the wood floor joists! Thankfully, we were able to smother it with the damp dirt down there. So yeah, wild card Daschle was not invited over for my plastic fire bending experiment.

I don't remember where the plastic came from, but I do remember holding the strip with pliers over the flame. The first piece melted so fast and started burning with thick black smoke that it scared me. I yanked it back and coughed. That's when I made an amendment to the safety plan: don't kill yourself with whatever these horrible smelly fumes were! I got a fan, opened the back door, and all the kitchen windows before trying again. Eventually, I figured out the perfect distance and timing with the heat.

### ***Four perfect loops.***

When I laid that final track piece, I was so excited, so proud! I took the model outside for better lighting and snapped Polaroids. I needed it captured instantly. Here's a photo of the Polaroid with my 10-year-old penmanship.



it is called the  
quadrupler

What was the next thought that immediately popped into my head?

This masterpiece is ready to be sold to Disneyland! And I wrote my letter. I don't have the original of that. But I remember it went something like this:

To whom it may concern:

My name is Kevin Glikmann. I am 10 years old. Enclosed are Polaroids of a roller coaster model I made called the Quadrupuler. It has four loops! I think you should make it!

And I sent it off!

Suddenly, my chore of checking the mail after school became a heart-pounding ritual. I was nervous, hopeful, excited. Sometimes I opened the mailbox slowly, peeking in. Sometimes I pretended it was just a normal day. Other times, I yanked it open and grabbed the mail fast, trying anything to calm my nerves.

Daschle said, "No way they'll respond. It's Disneyland, Buddy, they get a million letters a day."

Weeks turned into months, and I started to think he was right. Then one day, I opened the mailbox.

An envelope.

My name on it. My head was screaming, "This is it! I never get mail!"

In the corner: **WED Enterprises.**

HOLY SMOKES! What's WED Enterprises? I started bouncing up and down. I started shaking. I ran into the house, ran straight to my room, tore open the envelope, and read:

Dear Kevin:

Your recent letter was directed to my office here at WED Enterprises. WED (Walter Elias Disney) is the design and "Imagineering" branch of Walt Disney Productions. As such, we are responsible for the creation of all shows, attractions and outdoor entertainment for both Disneyland and Walt Disney World.

Thank you for showing us your "Quadrupuler" roller coaster - it looks like quite an adventure! As you may know Kevin, we are creating a new rollercoaster type attraction for Disneyland's Frontierland. Known as Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, this thrilling adventure will carry passengers on a high speed journey through the gold rush days of the old west. Big Thunder is scheduled to open later this year.

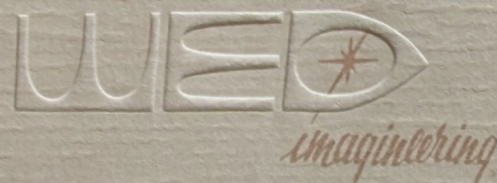
Thank you Kevin, for your interest in Walt Disney Productions.

Sincerely,

Tom Fitzgerald  
Concepts & Communications

Here is a photo of the original letter:

WED ENTERPRISES 1401 Flower Street, Glendale, California 91201 • 240-9430



April 13, 1979

Kevin Glikmann

Dear Kevin:

Your recent letter was directed to my office here at WED Enterprises. WED (Walter Elias Disney) is the design and "Imagineering" branch of Walt Disney Productions. As such, we are responsible for the creation of all shows, attractions and outdoor entertainment for both Disneyland and Walt Disney World.

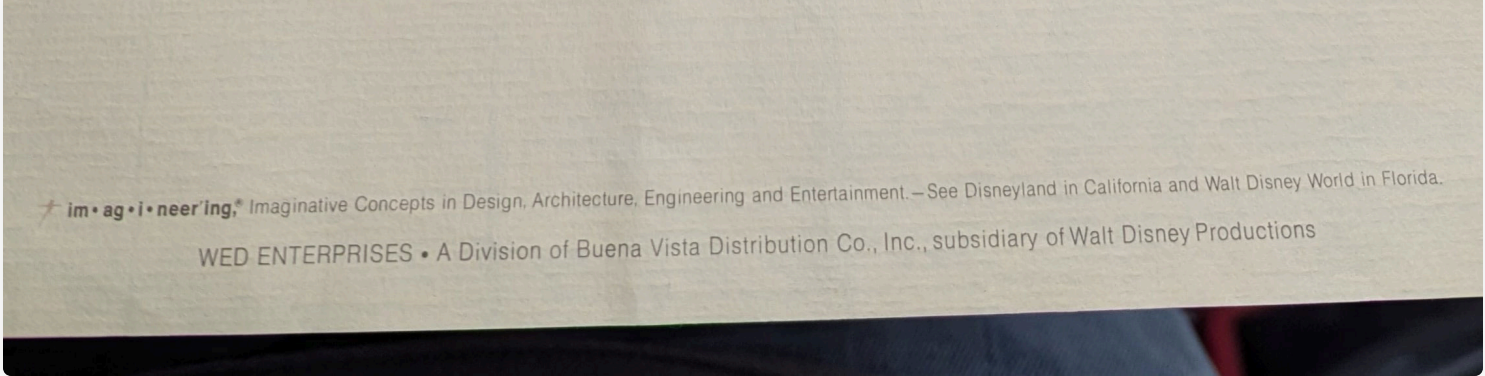
Thank you for showing us your "Quadrupler" rollercoaster - it looks like quite an adventure! As you may know Kevin, we are creating a new rollercoaster-type attraction for Disneyland's Frontierland. Known as Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, this thrilling adventure will carry passengers on a high speed journey through the gold rush days of the old west. Big Thunder is scheduled to open later this year.

Thank you Kevin, for your interest in Walt Disney Productions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Fitzgerald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the first few letters.

Tom Fitzgerald  
Concepts & Communications



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You would think that this letter would have ended my inventing spirit. That I would have gotten bitter and declared to the world, "No more will I invent for that mouse or anyone else!"

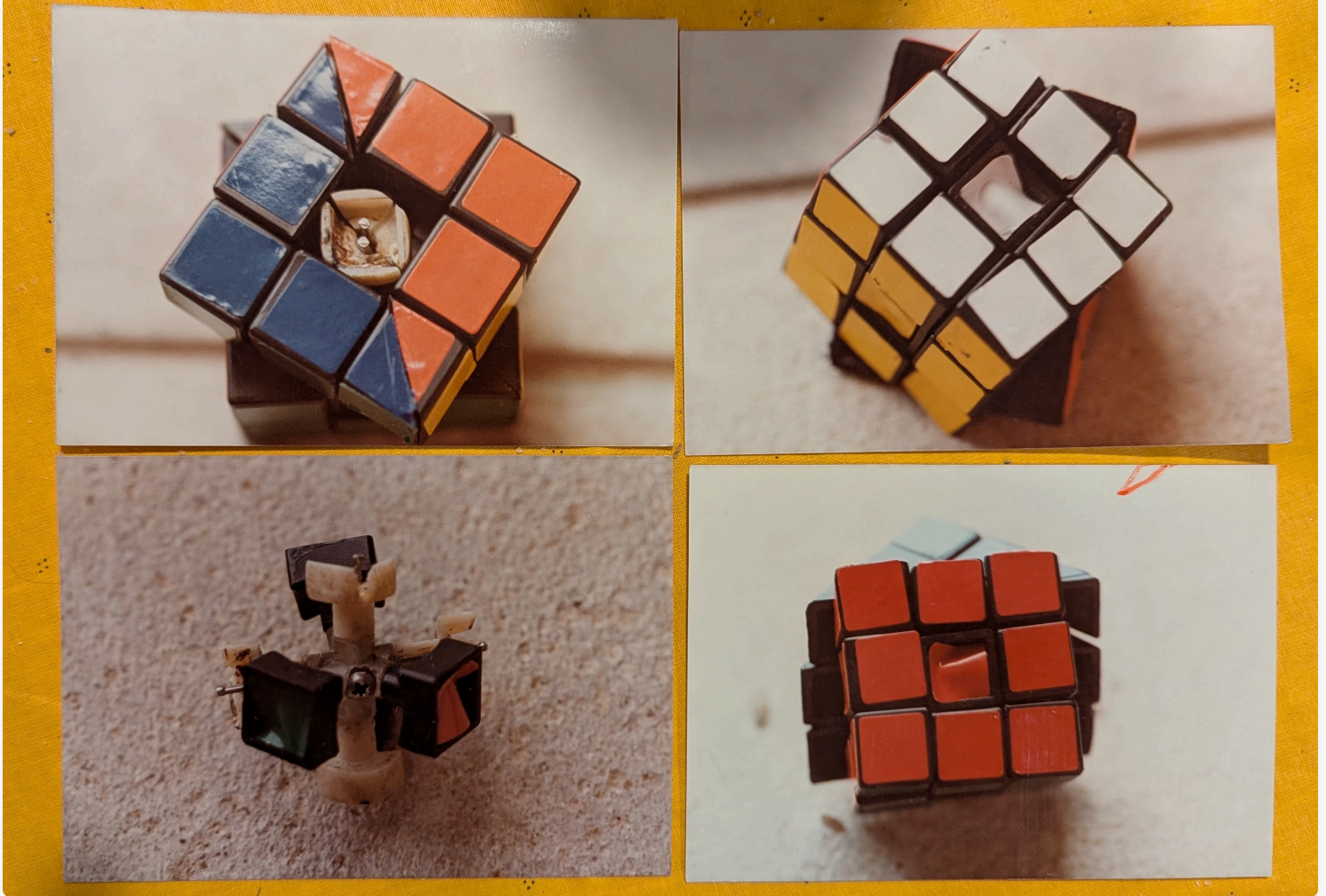
But no! Instead I was elated. I read it over and over. It said, "*It looks like quite an adventure!*" Disneyland liked it! I couldn't believe it.

Looking back, those words from Tom Fitzgerald didn't just validate my idea, they launched my 10-year-old self-esteem into orbit! (Tom Fitzgerald went on to become one of the most influential Imagineers in Disney history. According to his bio, he started in 1979. I got this letter in April 1979 which means this must have been one of his first tasks as a new Imagineer employee. lol! I wonder if he would remember?)

I never looked back.

A couple years later, the Rubik's Cube came out. I was obsessed. It took me weeks to solve, and once I did, my first thought was: *What if it could turn on the angle?* So I introduced Mr. Rubik's Cube to my bandsaw, redesigned the core, and built a very rough prototype.

Here are some pictures.



I sent it to Ideal Toy Company, but they rejected it straight away, they don't accept unsolicited ideas. But that didn't matter. They didn't understand that I had a letter from Disney Imagineering telling me my ideas are good!

That ten-year-old inventor is still alive in me, and still doesn't understand rejection. Over the decades, I've invented several patented board games that were shopped around but never sold.

But I'm convinced the early validation from the Disney letter gave me a kind of bulletproof resilience.

Today, I work in one of the most rejection-heavy industries there is, acting. To me, inventing and acting are deeply connected: both are about discovery, and both feed my inventing spirit. Successes are rare, but when they come, the joy lasts forever.

So I keep auditioning, and I keep inventing.

And sometimes, when frustration creeps in, wondering why I'm not further along, or why things aren't working out, that 10-year-old boy appears. He reminds me of what we believed back then, and what still guides me now- just keep going, one piece at a time.

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**Kevin Glikmann** is a Los Angeles–based actor best known for voicing Seth Briars in *Red Dead Redemption* and Leonard The Great in Nickelodeon's animated series *Get Blake!*

My latest invention is a Webby-nominated word game called [WordGlyph](#). An alphabet made of sticks. Reveal the word stick by stick. The fewer sticks you use, the better you score! Available on [iOS](#) and [Android](#).