

Risk vs Reward

Kim Pillion

Author Kim Pillion takes the reader on a journey back to carefree childhood summers with her narrative essay "Risk vs Reward," in which two young heroines attempt to repair a broken-down go-kart. Full of childlike wonder and youthful energy, the story reminds us of a more innocent time in our lives when having as much fun as possible was the only goal. The pure joy and excitement felt by the two junior mechanics during the story's climax is palpable; Pillion describes the two girls "grinning ear to ear and giggling with delight" as they ride their creation around the yard. With such lively characters and a refreshingly unexpected conclusion, "Risk vs Reward" is sure to leave the reader "grinning ear to ear" with nostalgic glee.

Rules are not always meant to be followed. The summer before my 5th grade school year, my best friend Sarah and I joyously discovered this untold truth. It began the day her father showed up with an old broken-down go-cart. He was clueless how to start it, but told us if we wanted to attempt to make it run, the cart was ours. Sarah and I were crafty kids, and though we knew nothing about motors, we felt up to the task.

For weeks, we tirelessly worked. Melting away, day in and day out, that hot sticky summer. We fumbled with socket wrenches, pliers, steel wool, whatever item we could dig out of her father's tool chest to perform surgery on the heap of metal. Each day, we tried something new in hopes it would make the difference. Meticulously we cleaned every inch thinking a good scrubbing would bring it to life. We stripped the chipping paint off, sanded down rusted age spots, then dressed it in a fresh coat of blue and white. We named it after characters we enjoyed at the time. Q*bert-scooter-Bubble-O, Jr. He was ours, and he kicked ass.

After gallons of sweat poured on her concrete drive and certainly a master mechanics license earned, our arduous task would end. It was during the final touch-up on our paint job that we discovered a tiny switch hidden under the lip of the steering column and knew this MUST be the missing

link....and it was. Without hesitation, we flipped the switch and yanked the start cord with all our might. We stood stunned in amazement as he woke from his slumber. He vibrated loudly as he sputtered and squealed then coughed out a huge puff of black smoke. As the toxic cloud cleared, he calmed to a smooth idle that hummed to us for a ride.

We were outside of ourselves with excitement. We burst into the house to show Sarah's dad our accomplishment. We ran through every room, hollered inside and out, desperate to find an adult. Her older sisters sat glued to the television as we scoured the house. Their casual mention of her parents shopping trip almost sent both of us into sudden cardiac arrest.

We sauntered back outside contemplating what to do. Once we saw our boy, it was a simple and quick computation of risk versus reward. We had spent too much time and effort to wait on her parents return. We smooshed our cheeks into the overly cushioned helmets her dad had knowingly set aside for this day and settled into position.

It was glorious to be riding around on what we had created. A green track guided us as we repeatedly rolled over the same course. Carefully coasting past her mother's flower beds and picking up speed as we rounded the huge oak tree that housed the fort we spent countless nights in. We rumbled over the stone patio before locking our sights on the small hill at the back of their property. Not knowing how high we would soar, we gasped for air as our small bodies lifted off the bench seat. Every molecule we sucked in escaped us, as we slammed back down to earth. I do not think Q*bert was ever a fan of that move, but we sure were.

We coasted down her driveway grinning ear to ear and giggling with delight into the cul-de-sac when panic took over. Sarah's parents had returned: busted! Our excitement fled as we sat head on, locking eyes as their vehicle towered over ours. Our expression mirrored theirs through the windshield. They were in shock from what they were seeing, and our elation quickly turned to terror.

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Fear rushed over me as we parked Q*bert and headed inside. Scolding words spewed from her mother's mouth as she marched in front of us. She rambled on about our foolishness and how she was going to inform my mom of our reckless decision. Not a word came from Sarah's father. For a moment I thought my life was over.

He quietly trailed behind as we followed her raging mother into the den. Reliving the joy from moments before, I began to feel that the consequence, no matter what, held no weight. The reward certainly outweighed the risk. It was her father's silence causing the painful twist in my stomach. Sarah's mother had plenty to say, but what was he thinking?

Her mother's face was still red with anger as I raised my hung head prepared for our sentence. Then her father stepped out from behind us. The ringing of her mother's harsh words and threats became muted. The angst in my belly immediately melted away. It was a sparkle in his eye that hinted everything would be okay, and bit of pride I noticed tug the corner of his mouth cheering, "Well done, girls, well done!"