

Math, Roller Coasters and A Thrill Seeking Author

Celeste Baine is no ordinary thrill seeker. Oh she loves roller coasters, wild rides and loop-de-loops, just fine, but she finds her “high” in more unusual places. And like the scariest coaster, her career has taken some amazing turns, twists and loops.

In the mid-eighties, Baine wanted to be a Disney engineer. Of course she had no idea how one accomplished that feat. Career counselors were no help. Information was scarce. Those were the days before the Internet grew huge. She was intimidated by the Disney image, had no contacts, no connections and little encouragement. Too young and frightened to confront the Disney Corporation directly, just out of high school, Baine chose a different career.

She wanted to do something with people, “people engineering” but wasn’t sure what that could be. In the end, she chose Electronic Engineering Technology, but kept dreaming of designing sets for Disney. Success at school now claimed her attention. In a hands-on program, she moved forward at a rapid pace. She graduated. Then marriage, money and time deferred the dream. For a while, her life seemed on track.

By '93, she was back in school. This time she decided to challenge herself further by learning the mysteries of another tough branch of science. She started a Biomedical Engineering program with the hopes of creating bionics or artificial limbs with

feeling. "Something like, 'The Six Million Dollar Man' said Baine.

Panic set in when Baine’s friends began dropping out of engineering school. In a swift exodus, she lost all her friends. Siting fears of mediocrity, worries about what they could do with the degree, discouragement because they were not math whizzes, 59 of 80 left the graduating class. Baine fought the panic. The result? Her first book, “Is There an Engineer Inside You?” was an antidote to the doubts and fears about a career in engineering and an antidote to her loneliness. Somehow, in the thick of a rigorous academic program, Baine managed to research and write. Providing pragmatic advice in straightforward terms, Baine helped others overcome their doubts and fears and forged ahead herself. By the time she graduated in '98, her first book was in its final stages. By February 99, it was available in leading bookstores around the country.

Yet, her reward started before the book rolled off the press. In researching the first chapter on nontraditional engineering, Baine came across a site about becoming an imagineer by Nate Naverson. Imagineering is a term coined by Walt Disney. It refers to the work of a team of people who are responsible for the creation and development of all aspects of a theme park. Naverson had been an imagineer for Disney. Suddenly, Baine realized, another book, was demanding her attention, a book that would help others and offer the support that had been denied her.



Celeste Baine is the author of “Is There an Engineer Inside You?: A Comprehensive Guide to Career Decisions in Engineering” and “The Fantastical Engineer: A Thrillseeker’s Guide to Careers in Theme Park Engineering”

Naverson was an inspiration and fount of wisdom but only became “real” when he called Baine after she requested permission to reprint some of his material for, “The Fantastical Engineer: A Thrill Seeker’s Guide to Careers in Theme Park Engineering”. The information he provided ignited Baines’ dream once again. On fire, she started desperately to look for information on this specialty within the field. There was little information to be found. Still, glamour and creativity drew her on. The desire to be part of developing adventures and thrills counteracted the usual stereotype of the nerdy engineer – pocket protector and calculator in tow; social skills absent! Still unable to find a book about becoming an imagineer, Baine realized she would have to write one.

Remembering the fears of her classmates in engineering school, Baine vowed to help

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overcome the stereotypes and negative images that lost her so many friends. She determined that math phobia wouldn't bar intelligent and creative students from their goal. As the idea for her next book, "The Fantastical Engineer: A Thrillseeker's Guide to Careers in Theme Park Engineering" took root she realized it would also take time.

Baine needed money while researching and writing it. How to combine her love of roller coasters, teaching, engineering and imagineering? She found a job at Louisiana Tech on a project to help K-12 science and physics teachers innovate in high school and middle school classrooms. Introducing the physics of roller coasters, she intends to help teachers inspire students to pursue careers in engineering and science. She will also be reinforcing her own goal of infusing engineering with adventure and excitement.

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She watched undergrads become discouraged, fearful, disillusioned. Math was the culprit. Everyone thought they needed to be math geniuses or else...

Asked what event specifically prompted her to begin the book, Baine replied, "The day I decided to sit down and write was the day I presented to the freshman biomedical engineering class (fall quarter of my senior year). All those bright and smiling faces so full of hope and expectation. I talked about

why I chose the degree, what I was doing to stick with it and why when it got really hard, I wouldn't give up. I talked about getting up at 4 or 5 in the morning to finish my



homework and they didn't even flinch. I knew at that time they had no idea of what they were up against."

Writing the second book required digging and digging deep. She knew this book would be unique in the field, that there were no models. She also wanted it to be up-to-the-minute timely and practical in a field that was evolving as she researched. Baine contacted over 200 theme entertainment companies. Again and again she forged her way to top executives, to ask what they looked for when hiring, what skills were important, how to get started. She realized the industry was highly changeable, the technology different from one attraction to the next. Yet, she wanted to make sure her information was useful to aspiring imagineers who would be entering the field in a few years.

Baine realized that students needed "friendlier" resources. So she wrote in plain English. She knew they had to get past fear of "the math". She had a flair for writing, an inspirational mentor and a need to help others pursue their own thrill seeking

dreams. She sharpened her pencils and ransacked her database, contacted everyone in the theme park world and wrote furiously. When she had checked and rechecked her facts and sources, she packed her book with hints, tips and contacts, made it easy to read and sent it into the world. She footnoted madly, created lists of sources, added advice and encouragement to page after page. Readers of this book would not struggle or become discour-

aged as she had. Baine smoothed out the sheer drops in this particular career path.

Celeste Baine will be signing copies of her new book, "The Fantastical Engineer" at AstroWorld, a Six Flags Theme Park in Houston, TX on Saturday September 2, 2000 from 4-7pm. Catch her infectious laugh and adventurous spirit. Baine is a real life role model for creative learners in your world. Or meet her on top of a coaster. Baine's thrill seeking has only just begun.

"The Fantastical Engineer: A Thrillseeker's Guide to Careers in Theme Park Engineering" is available at your leading bookstore or by sending \$17.95 plus \$4 shipping to Bonamy Publishing, PO Box 445, Farmerville, LA 71241. Call orders to 1-877-NGINEER (1-877-644-6337).