

Woo-Hoo!

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"Man, it's cold," I thought as I stood huddled with a group of strangers in the dark and bitter cold of Calgary's winter nights. We stood there, rattling away, like cars backed up in traffic, blowing puffs of exhaust into the air, as we waited to file into the warmth the stadium offered.

After a friendly pat down from the security guards at the doors of the Max Bell Arena, I was in. The sticky, beer-covered floors and nicotine-filled air never seemed more inviting; the warmth of the building mixed with the swarm of excitement eclipsed any negative sensations I might have had.

Passing through the packed hallways covered with various toothless mug shots of the players, past and present, I got the impression that I was at a sold-out hockey game. This idea soon passed as I approached the rink and saw that the ice was replaced with cement, which was littered with all sorts of people. As I scanned the area, I noticed what appeared to be a herd formed at the opposite end of the rink, trying to push through the gates at the front.

As I neared the rear of the group, the single blurred blob morphed into a variety of individuals standing in a tight formation. As I let my eyes bob from one head to the next, I was introduced to a unique sight each time. Blue hair, spiked hair, long hair, no hair—my eyes spun in their sockets, trying to digest the variety of sights they saw. As my eyes continued to wander, they were introduced to numerous other strange sights like the girl with buzzed, short, purple hair, with numerous rings and studs poking out from various parts of her face, to the shirtless, chunky guy with baggy pants and long straight hair.

The atmosphere quickly changed as the calm before the storm was ended by the dimming of the lights and the darkness that followed. This triggered the attention of everyone, causing the crowd to push against the gates like a bull getting ready for his eight-second romp. All of a sudden, the strike of the first chord triggered the bull to buck and jump about wildly.* This reaction amazed me, and as the song played out, the diverse audience began to move and act as one, as if taking directions through the music.

Still at the back of the mass, I hesitantly made my way toward the heart of the beast, which appeared to be closer to the front of the group. At the front, the intensity of the people had increased dramatically as now people at random were thrown into the air to float mysteriously on top of everyone else. This looked like the ultimate high, since ear-to-ear smiles were present on all of the floaters.

In search of this ultimate high, I ventured further through the crowd towards the mesmerizing lights that pierced the fog, which had become thick with the smell of nicotine and other various herbs. Working through the damp mugginess of the mosh pit, I started to get more into the music. I started to become entranced by the attack on the senses; if my eyes weren't busy taking in the different bodies flailing about, my nose was absorbing the bittersweet smell of perfume swamped by rank body odor. Either it was the intense pressure on the senses or the vibration from the massive black speakers surrounding the band, but I was continually drawn to the front.

As I looked around me, my eyes caught the eyes of the guy next to me. He was heavier set and quite a bit bigger than I was, and although we had never met before, he instinctively knew what I was looking for. He proceeded to boost me into the air where others who simultaneously lifted me above their heads soon joined him. Within moments, I was presented a birdseye view of the crowd, watching many heads of people bob about as many others surfed me across the sea of flesh. I soon caught a wave as well and started to travel across the rapids created as many hands beat across my body.

As I rode atop this wave of hands, nearing the front of the stage, the reality of the situation sunk in, and I realized that complete strangers were willing to hoist me above their heads. As I looked at the group holding me in the air, I noticed quite a few differences between them and me, and I wondered what possessed all of these different people to come together like this.

I thought about this as I continued to flop across the top of every-one and closed in on the stage. I soon had reached the front of the crowd and was plucked from my perch. As I was set down on my feet, between the frantic crowd and the band, who continued to play wildly, I looked back on the various individuals. It then hit—the thing that brings all of these different people together is the music. The appreciation I gained for the music at that instant was incredible. Anything that allowed complete strangers to coexist in such cramped quarters or to hoist each other above their heads is a very powerful thing. With the high I had just experienced, I looked back on the crowd, and with arms raised, I let out an appreciative "Woo-Hoo!" as I quickly cycled around to the back of the crowd to get back into the action.

* This is Alberta, remember—the image is of the rodeo bull, not the *toro de la arena*!