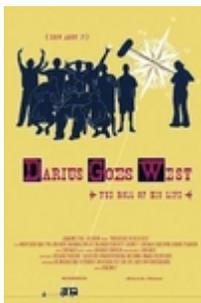


## Trick My Ride—And My Life

A review of the film



**Darius Goes West: The Roll of His Life**

(2007)

Logan Smalley (Director)




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Reviewed by

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*Darius Goes West: The Roll of His Life* is an independent film about a young man in Athens, Georgia, named Darius, who has Duchene's muscular dystrophy. The story centers on Darius's dream to travel out west to “trick his ride,” as popularized by the MTV program. To Darius, his chair represents his “wheels,” and he wants a sportier model of power wheelchair just as his nondisabled peers might crave a classier car.

Darius's tale begins with scenes of him participating in a camp for children with disabilities in his clunky old wheelchair. To fulfill his dream, 12 camp counselors and their buddies volunteer to drive an accessible recreation vehicle out west to the MTV studios in Los Angeles. The ensuing adventure is filled with many metaphors that represent strengths, facilitators, and challenges. Some metaphors relate to the process of going out west, while others relate to the goal of tricking his wheelchair (e.g., spinner wheels, custom paint job).

On a more global level, the experiences of Darius and his friends on this trip represent the notion of strengths and barriers that can affect full participation in society for people with disabilities (Stark, Hollingsworth, Morgan, & Gray, 2007). This story describes the interactive effect of person and environment variables on personal choice and independence. This is demonstrated through the lived experience of Darius as he leaves the protective care of his mother and home and heads out west, on his own for the first time in his life.

The aim of this review is to describe and discuss the key experiences of Darius and the metaphors that represent these experiences. The primary experience is the actual act of going out west. This is a dream Darius hoped would come true. He makes this observation one day while riding the bus: "Going west is a metaphor for being 'emancipated' to the new frontier, like the early settlers' new adventure." This trip allows Darius to get out on his own and empowers him to make his own decisions and choose the activities he wants to do. The experiences he has on the trip help move Darius from contemplation to actual action in terms of fulfilling his dreams (Prochaska & Velicer, 1977).

Two events on the trip highlight the environmental barriers that Darius encounters. One is a restroom stop where Darius finds the environment totally inaccessible. Another is a visit to the St. Louis Arch, a disappointing experience for Darius because he cannot climb the extra 50 stairs to enjoy the view from the top of the arch. Thus, he is discriminated against and separated from his friends. He cannot participate in regular activities that most nondisabled individuals take for granted. In spite of the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990, many barriers still exist that deter people with disabilities from full participation in the community (e.g., employment, education, voting).

Rather than outrage by society at the lack of accommodating environments, the focus is misdirected toward individuals like Darius who are "confined to a wheelchair," as some would state—placing the problem on the person rather than the environment. A more empowering approach would be to view Darius as a wheelchair user whose environment is not accommodating his needs (Brandt & Pope, 1997).

In contrast with these physical barriers that restrict or limit Darius, there are scenes from a trip to the ocean that show his companions lifting him from his wheelchair and placing him in the surf. Darius talks about this new life experience and the freedom and mobility that the waves allow. The buoyancy of his body and his increased ability to move are in stark contrast with the steel and rubber of his wheelchair, which limits his movement under normal gravity conditions. In a similar weightless experience, Darius takes a hot air balloon ride, again experiencing a sense of freedom from the earth's gravitational limitations.

The take-home lesson here is that both the person and the environment operate on a continuum basis. If a person with a severe disability has limited ability to participate in the environment, the environment can be expanded to a greater extent to allow the individual to more fully engage in the community or society (Brandt & Pope, 1997; Field & Jette, 2007).

The finale depicts Darius getting a whole new tricked-out power wheelchair, not in Los Angeles, as he expected, but right back in his own hometown. Understandably, Darius's

jaw drops when he sees his power chair presented at a classic-car dealership, replete with a boom box mounted with woofers and tweeters, customized paint job, hand-painted artwork, and spinners on his rear wheels.

Not only does Darius “trick” his wheelchair, he tricks his view of life. Like the change from a drab, old clunky wheelchair to a new, tricked-out version, the experiences Darius encounters on the trip open his eyes to overcome barriers and become more fully empowered and enabled to take control of his life.

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