

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Idora Park

Personal Experience

O. H. 1465

MARK J. HACKETT

Interviewed

by

Scott Smith

on

November 13, 1991

MARK J. HACKETT

Mark is the son of Ronald and Roseann Hackett of 4409 Rush Boulevard in Youngstown, Ohio. He has one other sibling, his sister Renee who is a senior Telecommunications major at Youngstown State University. Mark was born at Saint Elizabeth Hospital in Youngstown and has been a resident of the city all of his life. He attended Saint Dominic's School from grades one through eight. Mark Hackett attended Cardinal Mooney High School where he says he earned a bit of a reputation as a class clown. Mark felt that the Catholic schools he attended gave him an excellent education and helped to prepare him for college.

Mark attended Youngstown State University for five years until 1990 when he graduated with his Bachelors degree in Telecommunications in the spring of that year. Mark was not greatly involved with any campus organizations but in his final years of school he became greatly involved with the programming at WYSU/FM the University radio station. He worked mainly as a morning and evening disc jockey for this classical music station, but he also did the news and various broadcast features.

Today Mark is employed by W. N. Broadcasting which is a subsidiary of a larger broadcasting firm. Mark helps to prepare on air promotions and advertising as well as doing occasional disc jockey work on the air. Mark also works as a d.j. at Hooligans restaurant and bar in Boardman, Ohio.

Mark's greatest love is roller coasters and amusement parks. He is a member of the American Coaster Enthusiasts and a big fan of amusement parks. Mark spends a great deal of his free time during the summer traveling to various parks across the country.

He was also recently featured on a special feature broadcast on Youngstown's channel 27 WKBN detailing the past history of Idora Park.

-Scott Smith

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INTERVIEWEE: MARK J. HACKETT

INTERVIEWER: Scott Smith

SUBJECT: American Coaster Enthusiasts, attractions,
park layout

DATE: November 13, 1991

S: This is an interview with Mark J. Hackett, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Idora Park, by Scott Smith, at Kilcawley Center, room 2057, at Youngstown State University, on November 13, 1991, at 10:15 p.m.

Before we start talking about Idora Park and discussing the park, what the park meant to you and the history of the park, I'd like you to just talk about yourself: where you're from, where you grew up, what you did growing up in the city of Youngstown, and all those interesting questions.

H: My name is Mark Hackett. I grew up in Youngstown all my life. I went to St. Dominic's grade school and proceeded on to Cardinal Mooney High School where I graduated in 1985. I pretty much had a good childhood. I spent a lot of time in Mill Creek Park, which was a haven for getting away from everything and having a good time. From there, I went on to college at Youngstown State University and took about five years to get through it. I never went in the summers because I worked. I finally graduated in June of 1990. I did an internship at WN Broadcasting, which is the home for CD106 and WNRB, which was the sister affiliate. From there, I started working there, part time, doing specialty advertising and promotions. That's pretty much

what I'm doing now. I'm looking now for full-time employment. It's been kind of rough trying to find the exact route to go with my type of degree, with Speech/Communication and Telecom emphasis. It's not necessarily a specialized thing. It's more broad. You have the option of doing all kinds of things. It's just choosing where to go and how to go about doing so, especially with trying to find a full-time gig with decent pay and being able to relocate on that pay. The stuff I found wasn't enough to go on my own. But, I'm doing pretty well, and I can't complain.

S: Did you ever play in the WKBN woods?

H: Always. I used to do that. I used to ride my bike. . . . There used to be a trail right off of Berkshire. There was this little entrance there. Now it's fenced off. We used to ride our bikes in through the trails and with all the roots . . . boom with your bike. You'd end up in this wide open field, which is always a nice place to play some sand lot-style football. Until the neighbors--they had this huge field--it was still somebody's property--but we used to play all the time. I remember going back there and blowing off fireworks--little mischief that we would get into. There used to be a fort back there. I remember that you couldn't really get into because it was padlocked, but we used to hang out up there and jump off the roof into the snow. Yes, I remember playing there a lot. That was a good time, especially with my dirt bike. It was a good time.

S: How was Saint Dom's as far as a school? Do you have any memories about Saint Dominic's?

H: Saint Dom's was . . . it was a good way to be brought up in school. As far as the religious orientation, it was nice to have that as part of the education. At that time--it was a time where you would get that kind of orientation and develop from there, not necessarily as a religious person, but as a person. I think it pretty much helped out. Everybody was helpful there and everybody got along. I noticed once, going into eighth grade, just getting a feel for the rapport of all the teachers . . . It ended up being a good experience. I enjoyed doing that. I played football the last two years. That was a big part of summer and fall. It was a good time.

S: How was Mooney?

H: Mooney was even a lot more fun. There was a lot more freedom, first of all. I don't know if it's true with a lot of other high schools, but with Mooney, it seemed like everybody pretty much knew everybody. And, there

wasn't any animosity towards anyone. It was not necessarily a family thing, but everybody got along so the environment was nice to go there. I did some prank stuff. I was not necessarily considered the "class clown," but I had a reputation for pulling stupid things, like tripping down the stairs--I used to like Chevy Chase a lot! And in between classes, to entertain the students, I would trip down the main hallway stairs, and all my art supplies would go flying everywhere. I'd get a detention, but I wouldn't care because everyone would laugh. I got a reputation for doing that. I was in student council, I was a vice president, so we had to do our presentation on the stage in front of everyone. This is for graduation . . . all the student body, all the faculty, all the parents. The president and I were doing a presentation, like an introduction thing. When I was done, I fell down the stairs in front of everybody. So that was a good applause thing. It was fun. I had a really good time. A lot of crazy, fun people went to Mooney. In particular, we would do little gags and stuff in between classes. I just had a real good time. It's funny because the people that I was really close with, I don't necessarily hang out with them as much anymore. It doesn't bother me, but at the same time, that was part of growing up. So it was valid.

S: Were you involved with anything at Youngstown State? How would you describe your years at Youngstown State?

H: With Youngstown State, I wasn't necessarily involved with student organizations or fraternities or anything like that, but I tried to get involved with what I had to do in order to get through it. I placed an emphasis on doing what I had to do and getting finished what I had to do on time. It was another good learning experience. Even if I didn't learn anything in my major, I learned to be more well-rounded in different subjects--just have an orientation of them, not necessarily be an expert on them. I can't complain. It seemed like all of the five years that I've been here it worked out nice as far as scheduling and getting the classes that I wanted. Plus, toward the end, I started doing more stuff orientated with my major, such as I was an announcer at WYSU. Mr. Peterson heard my voice, during a broadcast that I was doing for a class in one of the little auxiliary rooms, where we would broadcast for the Society for the Blind, and he offered me a news position, which was 6:00 a.m. until 8:00 a.m. So, I would do that before class, and that kind of gave me a sense of accomplishment of starting out before I graduated. I did that, and then, I pulled an air shift at WYSU as well. That was very advantageous to what I'm doing now because it gave me a nice little foot in the door. WYSU is a nice, prestigious station. It was a

learning experience on how to work all the stuff and get a feel for the mic and that kind of thing. That, I'd have to say, was my main thing that I was really proud of doing while I was at the university. Then, I ended up getting an internship at the end, which was at WN Broadcasting. That proved to be beneficial too because that's now my current part-time employer.

S: How many are there in your family?

H: Well, right now . . . well, right now, and probably forever, is just my parents and my younger sister, and a dog. We're happy like that. The dog is a big part of the family situation there. He sleeps with my parents. He's a blessing, really. You always have him even if you are in a bad situation. You come home, and there he is. He's there for you.

S: Dog's are always in a good mood.

H: Always.

S: I've never seen a dog in a bad mood. My father and my stepmother have a dog and a cat. They are looking at moving to an apartment or condominium or something and they're like, "We cannot move any place without the dog and the cat. The dog and the cat have to come with us." That's the major requirement for them moving.

S: When did you first go to Idora Park?

H: I know I was there in the 1960's, but I was only a shaver then. I was born in 1967. So, I remember being there when I was two years old, but I don't necessarily remember what I did. I'd have to say the early 1970's was a time that I remember Idora the most, and always being intrigued by the sights and the sounds and the smells and the action that was taking place, it was just so exciting to me then. Just to deviate for a second, during the time I was growing up, I thought an obsession with that kind of thing was kind of odd; so I kept it to myself. But, I always enjoyed it. So, whenever I would go with people, it would always come out. But, it never really came out until I joined the American Coaster Enthusiasts, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to [the] preservation, enjoyment, and promotion of the roller coaster and parks. And, with Idora as a starting point, [it's] something to introduce you to that kind of fan club, so to speak. I didn't know it even existed. It came out in 1978, and I didn't join it until 1985. But, during that time, the 1970's or the 1980's, I always enjoyed going to Idora Park because, to me, Idora Park was a classic example of what a traditional American amusement park was supposed to be like. It had a lot of classic

rides, a top ten wooden roller coaster and a vintage roller coaster. Also, architecture reminiscent of the 1940's, which was more art deco-style, and it was a real old fashioned atmosphere. Places like that are becoming a dying breed. To only go back to Idora would be a dream. It's funny how I say that I went so many times and had such a great time there, but I didn't take full advantage because I wasn't into it as much growing up. Then, the park finally closed in 1984, the whole excitement of the atmosphere and all. And, it was my first roller coaster ride, and my first spin-and-barf ride, so to speak, was there [the mechanical rides]. Idora was pretty much very complete, even though the size was small and the attractions weren't as numerous as the bigger theme parks today. It had everything that a traditional park should have. A lot of other enthusiasts really miss it dearly because of the fact that it had all those things. Traditional parks all around the world are becoming a dying breed. Of course, Idora, unfortunately, fell victim to fire, two fires.

S: Do you think Idora could have stayed open?

H: Financially, I don't necessarily think so, unless a fund was put together to save the park. Toward the end, I know the morale of the employees was low, and the park was only open Thursdays through Sundays. I believe, if it was opened during the week, it would have to be after 5:00 because they just weren't making the cash. There was a lot of vandalism. A lot of the older, dark rides like the Lost River and the Kooky Kastle fell victim to vandalism. Kids would destroy the stunts, or urinate in the tunnels and stuff. I was noticing little things like that. I was noticing a small destruction even though the fire hadn't happened yet. As far as today goes, if it was opened, I'd be having a big part of trying to refurbish it or fund it or get some kind of a volunteer organization together, which a lot of parks and coasters across the country. . . . There has been a lot of relocation programs where a traditional park would close, and it would be relocated to a new home on the other side of the country, just through volunteer organizations and private funding. I would love to see it happen. I had heard that Idora was . . . the two coasters and possibly a few other rides were going to be auctioned off or donated to a place called . . . well, actually an organization called the Historic Amusement Foundation, which is based in Indiana. They had proposed an Electric Park, which was going to be a traditional park with all kinds of classic rides from parks gone by, and the two coasters would have been the Idora Wild Cat and Jack Rabbit. I heard that fell through; so I don't know the status of the Wild Cat or the Jack Rabbit,

except that it may fall victim to the bulldozer, which is a sad thing to see. A lot of other parks around the country too . . . a real estate developer will come in and put up condominiums in it's spot. To me, tearing down that is like tearing down the Statue of Liberty. Tearing down any kind of classic coaster, especially the wooden ones from the era that they were built and the era that the engineering took you on a lot more wild twists and turns and drops--not found in a lot of the coasters today. . . . The coasters today are almost "too safe." They take away from the thrill of the ride such as you will see a lot of head rests and seat dividers. . . .

S: They strap you in. . . .

H: You are so strapped in that the actual thrill of flying around in the seat, like in the old-fashioned rides. . . . For example, Philadelphia Toboggan Company manufactures roller coaster cars, and their cars used to have just a stationary lap bar. And now, you have individual ratchet bars where you push them down, and the more the individual ride takes you on it's course, the more it clasps down to you. So, it's not as exciting as the old-fashioned rides where you would be able to slide side to side and out of your seat. That's one of the things that the Wild Cat delivered, which made it a top ten contender for a wooden roller coaster. It's sorely missed today. To this day, I haven't had a roller coaster ride that has delivered consistently on a wooden coaster like the Idora Wild Cat.

S: How well do you remember the Wild Cat? Could you try to walk us through it?

H: Sure. No problem at all. I know the whole thing. I remember my first ride on it. First of all, I'd like to say that I was intimidated by the fact that I wasn't allowed to ride the Wild Cat. There were two rides at Idora Park I wasn't allowed to ride. One was [the] Idora Wild Cat, and one was a spin ride called Turbo, which is another dying classic ride that was only found at one or two parks around the country. I, finally, did get to ride one this year, which I hadn't seen since Idora.

S: What's the Turbo?

H: The Turbo was located where the Cheyenne Shoot-Out was, which is Idora's shooting gallery. That's what was in it's place. The Turbo was manufactured by a company called Chance, which is an American company. It basically was a double ferris wheel, but it was side by side, rather than on top of each other. The cars

featured round cages that swiveled or pivoted back and forth. So, you'd have the two motions of the wheels. One would go clockwise; one would go counterclockwise, and then, the whole ride would go around. I was intimidated by that ride because I wasn't allowed to ride it. Just the sights and the colors and seeing people ride it and have a good time, and then never seeing one again until this year, which was great because I got to ride one up in Canada. And, it just reminded me of Idora because that ride I wasn't allowed to ride, and the Wild Cat because it was a little too abrupt.

S: How was the Wild Cat? Walk us through it.

H: First of all, my first ride, I remember my dad saying--it was around 1974 or so--I had already ridden the Jack Rabbit which was my first coaster. With the Wild Cat, my father told me, "Mom is going to take Renee," which is my sister "on the Merry-Go-Round," the Carousel, and "How would you like to ride the Wild Cat?" I think I freaked out. I was excited that that was going to be my first real coaster. I remember sitting down. It was toward the evening. It was a little bit dusk. Rollercoasters seem to go a little faster at night, and it really delivered a great ride that evening. I remember to this day . . . I think we sat toward the front, although my preference is toward the back because it was more of a brutal ride. I'm a rough rider. I love rough rides. Basically, the Wild Cat began in the station. The station kind of went on a downward incline; so half the train was on a downward incline, and the other half was on a straight incline. I remember sitting down with my dad, and he made me sit on the side that didn't have the opening, for protection's sake. I can remember the ride beginning, going down that little incline, and it made a left hand turn into an "S" tunnel, where the shape of the track was in the configuration of an S. It was about 250 feet long. It was really neat going through it because it had a real screechy sound. I remember that adding to the excitement because it was pitch black. When you come out of the tunnel, you come up onto the lift hill, which was approximately 90 feet tall, and that would take you high up above everything. Half the Wild Cat was built up on a side of a hill, and the other half was flat to the ground, to the midway. That half on the lift hill side would take you up 90 feet, but it would seem so much higher because it was situated way above Mill Creek Park and you could look down on all the trees. Then I remember he was holding me. I was scared, but I was also excited at the same time. It took you to the top of the 90 foot lift hill, and you made a right hand turn around. And, you were just about to negotiate the first drop. The first drop, I remember, picked up some speed. It accelerated nice,

but it wasn't necessarily a real exciting drop. It was more of an incline drop. So when you get to the bottom of that, it was probably the most exciting coaster moment, especially for a novice rider. You would hit a mini speed bump, and no matter which seat you were in, it delivered so much. The negative G force . . . the negative G would be going out of your seat, and the positive, being sucked down into your seat. A lateral G force is when you go from side to side. That speed bump--I felt like I was going to be ejected from the car. That was how intense it was. It was so exciting to go because that was the thrill of the ride, that uncontrollable feeling. So you'd fly out of your seat on that speed bump, and you'd immediately go up into a fan curve, which is basically a sideways turn, rather than a flat turn. In other words, you are on a bank. I remember seeing the flags going across the fan turn there, yellow and green flags, just like the actual cars of the Wild Cat. I remember seeing them up on that fan turn there. That was right above the Lost River's waterfall. So, you go around this banked fan turn--and it was real rough--and when you'd come off of it, it was like a rib-breaker. There was a way to ride that ride, especially in the backseat because you'd get crushed. It hurt, but it was a good hurt, so to speak. So you'd get slammed into the right side of the train on the way down off the fan curve, and then, you'd drop down. Your next hill was a pretty high hill, and it was one of my favorites of the ride because it went down to ground level. That was exciting because it utilized the hill to it's extreme because it went all the way down to ground level with great acceleration speed. I think it hit 55 or 60 mph as far as top speed. Not the whole continuous ride, but at spots. So then, after you would hit that hill, that would take you to ground level. You'd come up on what they would call a "swoop turn," which is basically a swoop downward on a bank through the lift hill part of the structure. The Wild Cat was a twister layout, so it did multiple figure eight configurations through the whole layout. So, once you come down to that swoop turn, you drop down, and then, you come back up heading back toward the fan turn again. This time, you'd be on a straight portion of track, which would just slightly bend to the right a little. So, it was kind of like a tilt to the right and then back up again, still cruising pretty fast. There wasn't really any midcourse breaks, but right there, I can say that that would be probably most slowest part of the ride. Then, you would drop down again, the final drop, before the grand slam final, which would head you straight toward the fan turn. You'd dive left into a severely banked tunnel. The tunnel was partially enclosed, and the rest of it was open a little bit. So, you would have the effect of being dark, and then, all of a sudden,

some light just zooming by you. I can remember that to this day. That was the most exciting finals on a wooden coaster ever. You would just be screaming coming down on a left hand bank so fast, and then, a last little dip. And then, you would come to one of the best station finals You would just come screaming into the station, and then, come to a halt. They didn't like brake you right away. You would just come screaming right in. You'd come under the break run, and that was pretty much a ride on the Wild Cat. It was pretty rough, but the trains were sleek. And, they accelerated nicely, and they only basically had a little bit of padding on the sides but a stationary lap bar. That almost made the ride seem dangerous, but at the same time, more exciting than probably any wooden roller coaster in the country at that time. So, that's the Wild Cat.

S: That was the Wild Cat. I think about it myself. I remember getting up the first hill, coming down, I remember coming through those tunnels.

H: Those tunnels were fantastic.

S: I don't know if you know this kid Joe Crush. . . .

H: I've heard of him.

S: That's who I went with on my first time on the Wild Cat. I think he may have went to Mooney. I'm not sure. We were in the back.

H: The back is the ride.

S: He tricked me into it. He was like "The back is the best place to go. You don't get as scared. . . ."

H: You just get beat up.

S: I walked out of there dazed. Have you been on a ride comparable to the Wild Cat any place else?

H: I'd have to say there were elements of the Wild Cat that stand out on other rides. I haven't been on the Coney Island Cyclone yet, just because I haven't been to New York city yet, but I plan on getting there because that is a classic by which others are judged. I haven't been on that yet, but I have been on some pretty exciting twister-style layout coasters. One being the Riverside Cyclone in Agawam, Massachusetts, which is reminiscent of the old Traver rides. He used to make terrifying roller coasters in the 1920's and 1930's that swooped on the first drop. It was just like you would drop down and go back the other way you came. It was real intense. In other words, you would

drop and turn right and then go back the way you came on the first drop. On a wooden coaster, that is pretty spectacular! That's a really good one. There are sluggish spots. But, as far as the older coasters go, I'd have to say probably the Wild Cat delivered the most at a consistent rate, without having any dead spots on it. Next year I am going out to Denver because there are two out there that are really, from what I've read and heard, reminiscent of some Wild Cat features, only they are on a larger scale. . . . Two traditional parks out there . . . I plan on doing that trip next year because, once again, one of the parks, Elitch's Gardens which is about twenty miles outside of downtown Denver, will fall victim to relocation of the whole park just to expand, but it will take away from the tradition that it was once known as. They have two wooden roller coasters. One being Mr. Twister, which is a top ten wooden coaster, and also the Wild Cat. When they move, they are not going to rebuild the Wild Cat. So in other words, if I was to go to the park in 1993, then the Twister would be rebuilt completely and won't be the same ride, and I won't get a chance to ride a classic coaster which was made in the 1920's or 1930's which is the Wild Cat, which is more of an out-back design as opposed to a twister layout. So I'm going to head out next year. Hopefully, that will be close to the original coaster that I rode.

S: How was the Jack Rabbit?

H: The Jack Rabbit was a great family ride. It was an older ride. It was one of the oldest operating in North America. It was built in 1910 by T. M. Harton Company, which I believe is somewhere around the Pittsburgh area. Jack Rabbit was my first coaster ride, which was always a thrill. It was a good ride. It wasn't necessarily fast, but it had nice drops. It was a great introduction to the bigger rides. But, it was unique that it had open front cars, which if you picture a roller coaster car with four sides, picture the front cut out, which just had bars sticking out. So, you had the visual thrill on the first drop of seeing all the track ahead of you, which is neat. It had just a little seatbelt and a stationary bar. Of course, we never buckled the seat belt. We would always buckle it under our legs just to get the effect of the ride. It had a nice station with art-deco, and it began with a straight-a-way that went out toward the parking lot. It was nice for people watching out in the parking. You would do a series of mild rabbit hops, which were like little hills and then a left-hand turn on to the lift hill. I remember the lift hill being about seventy feet tall. You would get to the top, and you would make a left hand turn on the turn around. And, do a nice--not a real steep drop, but it accelerated nicely.

Then, you went over a camel back hill, which was like the hump of a camel on the second drop, and once you got passed that hill, you went up to the third hill, which would immediately turn left on a dogleg hill, which is shaped just like a dog going on a fire hydrant. You'd go up to the hill and then make a left and go out toward the ball field, which was adjacent to the Jack Rabbit. You would do a series of mild little drops and during the course. There was two double dips, which was two little hills in succession. On the second one, there was always, like a lift out of your seat, which was kind of nice, and a flat turn around, which was kind of unique. It was built on the ground. You would go around this huge flat turn around; then you would go through a series of, like I said, mild hills and a double dip on the way back and the return run into the station. I remember, it as my first coaster ride. The Wild Cat was always more terrifying when you weren't allowed to ride it because you didn't know what to expect, and it lived up to everybody's expectations, no doubt. If Idora was around today, I'd be going--if they were open during the week, during the summer--I most likely would go there Monday through Thursday, to avoid the crowds, every day after 5:00, after work, pay \$4 and ride all night. I don't have that option anymore, it's just a skeleton of what it used to be.

S: What else do you remember really strongly from the park?

H: I remember every ride, and I remember every ride that was there.

S: Okay. Walk us through the midway.

H: I can walk you through the midway. First of all, everybody went in the back entrance, even though most people assumed it was the front entrance. It had the larger sign. Once you get into the parking lot, you'd have the Jack Rabbit on your right, and it was always a nice visual ride because it was situated right in the parking lot and the station was on the midway. Also visible was the ballroom, which was an antique ballroom. It had a nice capacity, beautiful inside. I wish they could just restore that at least, and have activities in there. I remember going to Spring Thing. I don't know if you remember that. It's when WHOT, a local station here, would promote a day at Idora Park with bands. That was my first orientation into a live rock show in conjunction with riding rides, which was nice.

As soon as you walked in, you had a ride called the Rock-O-Plane, which was a ride manufactured by Eyerly

Manufacturing, I believe. It was basically a ferris wheel with cages that you could turn, vertically turn, and you could also put them in a fixed position, which you could ride in a somersault-type fashion. That was put in around the 1970's. It was after the Turbo was gone because they relocated to that spot. So, the Turbo was gone, which was sad to see because I never got to ride it there.

Next to that, you had the Spider, which was your basic spider ride, and it was a "spin-and-barf" ride. A lot of people that didn't like rides didn't like the spider the most because it had such a twirling up and down motion. Next to that was the Chance Yo-Yo ride, which was a junior version of the Wave Swingers that you see today at the bigger theme parks. It was your basic swing ride. There was a nice little section of rides in that area. That was probably the newest part of the park. The putt putt course was exactly adjacent to the Yo-Yo. It was a nice little course. If you go there today, you can still see some of the actual grounds for where some of the holes were. To your right, of course, you have the whole extension of the ball room. So, there wasn't anything more on that side until you got to the break. Next to the putt putt course was the Turtle ride, which was another classic ride. There are not too many of those left in the world. It was made by Harry Traver, once again. He utilized this track that went up and down like a small roller coaster. It had a series of arms that would extend out to these turtle shaped cars, which people would sit in a circle and hold on to this big wheel. It was kind of fun going over the hills because you would lift out of your seat and stuff. You could hear it through Mill Creek Park if you drove through or rode your bike through. It would go up and down a series of hills around this track. That was a classic ride. They are cherished by enthusiasts.

To your right, then, you would be able to go down this little midway that housed the Jack Rabbit, and also one of the entrances to the ballroom. That's where the Jack Rabbit station was. Behind that actually, was the ball field, which a lot of soft pitch games were thrown. The King and his Court were there, which was a fast-pitched trick soft ball team my dad used to take us to see, I remember. Right next to that is a huge grass hill that would take you up to the picnic grounds which were really nice because they were situated high above the park, heavily wooded. It was a real nice family atmosphere thing. Continuing down on the midway, you would have the Lost River ride, which again, was a classic ride, I believe in the United States, there is only one of those left. The generic name for that is called Mill Chute. You basically go through a

tunnel, usually themed which would have scenery. The theme of the lost river was a jungle; so there were scenes from a jungle, like alligators and natives and monkeys.

S: Did they have music in there?

H: There was jungle sounds, like the bongos. I can hear it today. I can hear the bongos; I can hear the monkeys, and I can hear the elephant.

S: On the facade on the front, did they have. . . ?

H: An Indian guy that played the bongos. He wasn't really playing, but they had a track, the noise track.

S: Talking about this stuff now . . . this stuff is really coming back into my head, and I can really picture it.

H: Well, the Lost River was unique too. You got in these old wooden boats, and the ride had, like that rustic smell to it, which was really neat. You began with going through a tunnel, and you'd go through all these different scenes of the jungle or whatever. It was really heavily themed. I was surprised. As a matter of fact, underneath the ballroom today, they have some of the greenery, the shrubs and the fake palm trees, and ferns and all that kind of stuff. They had the big elephant right in the front. He was like the entrance way. It was animated, and it had the soundtrack on it. So, you'd go through the tunnel through the back of the ride, and then, you'd come up a lift hill, which was a chute, the mill chute, the actual chute itself, with the Wild Cat right behind you. You're going up the lift hill, and the Wild Cat goes screaming around this turn. It was, like such a neat area to be in. Real exciting. Basically, you go up to the top of the hill; and then, you'd curve down to the right, as you come down the small incline, and make a splash in front of the waterfall, which was probably the most significant, beautiful things of the park. It was built on a man-made waterfall with a little grass hut at the top and a little native sort of guy playing the bongos. You'd come down to a splashdown. You wouldn't get soaked or anything. It was just like a nice visual thing. It was a nice pleasant ride, great for lovers or just families and stuff. You went through a series of water and stuff. That was one of the rides that was sorely missed, of course, that the fire would have to hit; the Wild Cat, the Lost River, and the park office where all the blueprints were--which the office was adjacent to the Lost River. Continuing down the midway to the right hand side, right by the Jack Rabbit, there was the Cheyenne Shoot-Out, which was one of the last attractions put into the park, more toward the mid-

1970's, which was your basic themed shooting gallery. I don't know if you know this; but if you take a flash camera and flash it, all the different stunts go off at one time, which is a no no at parks. Anyway, that's where that Turbo ride sat. It was a nice visual ride as well.

The rest of the midway consisted of games of food. I remember one of the games I used to play because it was easy to win when you were little. It was the gold fish game. You'd always get one of those junky rubber toy prizes, but it was just fun, especially toward the evening that's what we did. On the way back down the midway toward the other end of the park, of course, you'd have all the games with a lot of neon and art-deco, a lot of nice architecture. To the left, would be the grand carousel, which was an original Philadelphia Toboggan Company carousel--which the horses, I know, have been all auctioned off. The actual canopy or big top that it was in is still there. Coming down a little more, that started the hill. There was a gradual up hill on the midway. To the right of that, you would have your penny arcade, which had a lot of old classic nostalgic games, nickelodeons and stuff like that.

S: Games with stars in the middle or whatever and you stamp your names on them.

H: Right. They had those. And, they had the old fashioned crane that would just come down and grab a handfull of junk, for a quarter. I always took the junk home, though. I don't have any of it, of course. I believe there was a small gift shop there too. So, as you are coming up this hill, you'll run into various Porkey-the-pig paper-eaters or Leo-the-Lion paper-eaters, which are unique to traditional parks. It had the little facade of the painted animal with a wide open mouth and the soundtrack of a lion's voice trying to coax a child to throw the paper away.

S: I did it.

H: So did I. Basically the mouth was open, and it had a suction thing that would suck the paper right in. It was an incentive to get kids not to litter in the park. It was a great way to do it. So, as you come down the Wild Cat there, it would be on your left, right passed the carousel, and then, you'd go into the main section of the park, which was the main old fashioned midway part. After you pass up all the games in the arcade, there would be some food stands to your left--what I'll do is I'll go around the outskirts of the park, and then I'll go into the middle. There were food stands to the left and the Crazy Horse Saloon, which housed a

restaurant. It was a nice building. Right there, they used to have a ride called the Flying Cages, which was a manual ride. Basically, these cages just went up like a swinging gym. That ride was removed in the mid 1970's because there was a lot of accidents. Kids would fall down in there because you'd have to stand up and make it go yourself.

Then, on the outskirts, you go down the hill, and straight ahead, would be the Kooky Kastle, which was a classic dark ride--which are slowly disappearing too, all the old classic 1960's style, 1970's-style rides. It was your basic haunted theme ride. I can remember all the stunts in there. I know all the scenes. A couple in particular, being the dynamite when you'd go past it. The barrels of dynamite would come over you and explode and stuff . . . that kind of scene. There was also a woman in there that was naked; and she was wrapped around with a snake over this rock, and her breasts would move up and down. That was the mechanical part of the ride. It was just so funny! I can remember that to this day. Also, they had a skeleton in there with a hard hat; and he'd pull this lever, and this board would come down and break and then go back up again. Those were some of the scenes that I remember about the Kooky Kastle. It used to be a ride called the Gold Nugget, which was more of a western mining theme-type ride. Next to that, the Fun House used to sit there, in that whole area, but the Fun House was taken out before my time. I remember the Wacky Shack, which was adjacent to the Kooky Kastle, and that was your basic walk-through, fun house-style thing with a lot of lights and effects. They had a tilted room and mirrors. That was replaced with probably the last attraction that was put in the park, which was Laughin' Lena's Loony Land. It was a fun house-style thing too, with heavy emphasis on the mirror maze though. They had Laughin' Lena, which was an old mechanical doll, which laughed and had a soundtrack. That was an old thing from the 1940's that they resurrected somewhere. I don't know where. So, that was put in in the later years of Idora.

Next to that, was the Helter Skelter, which was a classic bumper car ride, one of the bigger ones that I had been on. I remember going on that quite often. Then, the entrance that is considered the front of the park, that not too many people would go through--they would always go through the back entrance, which seemed like the main entrance--if you would come in through that entrance, to your immediate left, you would have the Hooterville Highway, which was an antique car ride. Idora was just a very complete traditional park. It had all the elements necessary. The antique car ride had a nice little course through it. Also, in the

later years, back behind it, they put in a ride called Fantastic Flying Machine, which was a flying scooter ride--which is an airplane ride that has a rudder that you can control to make it go in and out while you're going around the course of the ride. Next to that, they had this huge women's bathroom. For some reason, there wasn't a men's room there, but there was this huge women's bathroom. I remember this big white building. And, adjacent to that, was the Paratrooper ride, which if you are familiar with a paratrooper, it was a mounted ferris wheel-type ride with parasol tops on it, kind of as if you are doing a parachute, on a ferris wheel-type course. Behind that was kiddie land, which was a very complete kiddie land. They had at least fifteen rides for kids. I remember all the little tiny chariots and buggies that would go around.

Also in kiddie land, was a junior wooden coaster, which was another introduction to roller coasters for little kids. It was a nice pleasant little ride. It still sits there rotting away. I know people who have the cars. I also know people who have the sign from the Wild Cat and the two cats above their fireplace. They got that at the auction.

S: How much did that cost?

H: Oh, I forget what they paid. Each piece was like \$200 at least, or something like that; but it went to the highest bidder. So, I guess the most hardcore enthusiasts picked that up. So anyway, after you pass the paratrooper ride and all of kiddie land, which had a lot of different activities for kids to do. You'd go up on the hill there, which was also the picnic grounds [there] was the station for the train. It was a nice little classic train. It took you out passed the Hooterville Highway into, like the Jack Rabbit grove and passed the ball park, and then you'd come back on the picnic grounds, up above the hill looking down on everything. That now sits at McKenzie Square in Hubbard. You can ride it for fifty cents or something like that. The Idora Limited was what it was called. Of courses, right there was the infamous french fry stand, which everybody remembers. I believe someplace in town has them, or close to them, similar--probably, never the same; I forget where. The fries were actually overdone, but they were soggy and great at the same time. They were in a big cone, and they were cut real thin. If you put vinegar on them, they were soaked. Vinegar and salt. It was the worst thing for you, but they tasted great. They were not necessarily famous, but they were infamous. Infamous Idora Park french fries. The building still stands there today.

A couple of the other rides that were in that area, like right in the heart of that area of the park down toward the Kooky Kastle was the Scrambler ride and to the right of that was the Ferris Wheel, which was your standard ferris wheel. Then, a classic Caterpillar ride--there aren't too many of those--where you go over a course of small hills, and a canopy would come over your head and make it dark. Next to that was the Tilt-A-Whirl, which is the ride that pretty much any traditional park has had or does have. The last ride in that area, which was sad to see gone, was the Traver Rocket Ship ride. Out of the couple I have been on, there is only one left in the country. It's at Geagua Lake. There used to be one in Allentown, but it's gone. These rockets were very old fashioned. They were real big, huge, silver rockets with red decor on them. They were rated the best of it's kind by people that loved those kind of rides. They went out real far and pretty fast. It was kind of scary because the rockets would fly out so far on these cables, they would go out real far over the park and over other rides. You could look down on other rides and patrons of the park. Below the huge rocket ride was the Rocket Launching Pad, rather than the Lunching Pad, where they would have cotton candy and candy apples, and I think, hot dogs. That's pretty much what all comprised Idora Park.

They didn't do too many renovations on the park toward the end. There weren't a lot of ride changes or additions to the park. But, what it had; it was close to home. It was inexpensive, and it had everything that traditional park enthusiasts like myself would find inviting. It's sorely missed. There is just really nothing you can do about it. I'm glad that I was able to grow up with a traditional park of that setting and that size, especially close to home because I frequented the area often. But, like I said earlier, I didn't necessarily get to take advantage of it as much as I would have liked to because once you have something. . . . I can remember talking with my dad, "Dad, how come everybody's going to Cedar Point? Why can't we go to Cedar Point? Let's go to Geauga Lake, King's Island, all the other parks." And didn't even realize that what we had. . . . It remains more special now than any other park.

S: That's the truth.

H: Theme parks are great. They have a lot to offer; they're beautiful. But, there is something about an old style traditional park like Kenneywood in Pittsburgh, which is like a large-scale Idora. It has so much charm and beauty to it, just because of the fact that it was kept just like it was. . . . Plus they add

new attractions that do not take away from that charm. It's sad to say that there is only a few traditional parks and a lot of theme parks left in the country.

S: The way I feel is that Cedar Point is antiseptic. It's too clean; it's too high tech. It doesn't have that personal feeling. Idora Park was Idora Park, and it was Idora Park ten years after that; it was still Idora Park. It was the place; it was old fashioned. You could go in there and ride a ride with the same guy who had been working that ride forever, or the same guy making the cotton candy.

H: Well, Idora Park was very family oriented. Cedar Point is very corporate because they have such a large scale entertainment complex. What's nice about Cedar Point is the fact that . . . first of all, it's on Lake Erie so it's a very nice recreation spot, a very nice facility. To be honest, it is a traditional park, but it has some themed areas, like the Western Frontier Land or whatever. It's on a grand scale; it's like a theme park as far as size and capacity. They always have to bring something in to draw more people, and that makes it almost like an unpleasant atmosphere, even though it is a beautiful park. They do take pride in their cleanliness. I can remember Idora, being there on Labor Day. It would be so packed that their trash cans would be overflowing. There would be a million bees. Still, that is something I remember from that park, even though some other people may say that it was dirty or whatever, not necessarily in a bad area; but it was more prone to vandalism. Idora had every complete detail that I would want, except for the Turbo. Cedar Point, though, I have a good time there, of course, because the coasters there are very innovative and state of the art. They have some really good ones. The atmosphere is beautiful. I would have to consider that my home park, that and Kennywood. I can't go to Idora anymore. Kennywood is more on the traditional scale and Cedar Point is more on the thrill scale. As a matter of fact, I've got a season pass to Cedar Point this year. I probably went there this year more than any time I've ever been there. I went there nine times this year. To me, that kind of investment is worth a million dollars.

S: Do you think Idora would have stayed in business today, with malls, with video games, with everything else? Do you think there is a need. . . lets say in Youngstown or even in the rest of the United States. . . ?

H: To me, if somebody was going to take it and redevelop it, they may have thought that it would flop because of the attractions that were destroyed. It would have to

be the Wild Cat, it would have to be the Lost River, two classic attractions. If anything, they could do something and make it a metro park and have ice skating and big bands still come in to dances at the ballroom. Set up some fountains; set up some concessions. Renovate; plant some flowers. Make it a place just to walk through, just for memory's sake even. As far as an amusement park, I think it was losing money towards the end. And, to be honest, a lot of the fires that had happened there, two fires on the best attractions there--there is a lot of rumor. I'm not going to speculate, but there was a rumor that it may have been deliberately set for insurance reasons. By who, we don't know. But, that has been a rumor, and I've heard it from more than one person. But, there are a lot of families that didn't get to show their kids Idora Park. Now, all they have is a skeleton, and they don't get to experience what it was like. Even if you look at an old videotape, an old film or picture or something--you see it in it's heyday--you can't believe that that's actually what happened and how many millions of people have gone through there, ever since the early 1900's. So, I don't think it would have survived financially, but I believe there was a possibility that somebody could have taken it and done something with it. I'm surprised that some of the bigger corporate heads in this town didn't take advantage of the sight. There are not that many acres there, and it would have been relatively inexpensive to buy the land. The refurbishing and all that stuff would have taken a lot of funding; but to this day, I would believe that there are a lot of people out there that would feel that it was a treasure and not necessarily would donate their money, but would donate their time in figuring out a way to bring back a tradition that was lost. Now, we have Mill Creek Park and no Idora Park. If Mill Creek Park wasn't there, what would we have? To me, those two things there in that area were vital to growing up because there was so much to do and so many memories. Mill Creek Park, in particular, at least that will always be there.

S: Hopefully.

H: Hopefully, well parts of it, at least. Financially, I don't see Idora surviving in 1992 with the competition that is out there. People will travel. They'll travel two and a half hours; they'll travel five hours to King's Island just to experience the thrill. But of course, the Idora Wild Cat was considered top ten status. A lot of enthusiasts in the groups like myself, and there are other enthusiast's organizations that would help try to promote and preserve. We have different conferences and conventions during the summer months and nonsummer months. One new thing that we did

is the preservation weekend. We hold that, at a traditional park, we present a plaque to the host park and commend them on the way that they keep the park together in its original form and preserve the classic ride and don't destroy it; don't bring it down to condominiums; don't change it into a theme park to make money. Leave it as is. There are at least over four thousand or five thousand people that will come to your park in the future. We usually have exclusive ride times, which are nice, where you get two hours or so on the ride exclusively, before it opens or after it closes, which is nice. Little parks across the country like Conneaut Lake Park, Lakemont Park, which was prone to demolition because of the fact that it wasn't making money, but we had a preservation fund where people can contribute money to be negotiated with parks into refurbishing, revitalizing. It's an ongoing process, and a lot of times we lose. But, we try and the preservation over the enjoyment would have to be the main goal of the coaster enthusiasts. That's what I would assume. Everybody would have that general idea because we don't want to see anymore wooden coasters get wrecked by the wrecking ball. They are irreplaceable, even if you rebuild them. Now, relocation is a nice thing. A park in Texas called Playland closed in 1985 in San Antonio. They had a ride called the San Antonio Rocket, I believe it was. Well, Dick Knoebel--he lives in Elysburg, Pennsylvania--has a park called Knoebel's Amusement Resort. His park has a beautiful setting. It is in a mountainous region, and the park is located in the trees, all these classic rides from all these parks that have become defunct. These rides come from different parks, and here, he rebuilt the San Antonio Rocket at his park and recristened it the Phoenix. Now, it is a top ten ride, and now people flock to Knoebel's. That was one classic example of preservation efforts that have been successful. If only that could be done with the Wild Cat. The engineering at this time will not be the same as it was in 1930; so if the Wild Cat was rebuilt, it wouldn't be as exciting because they would have to take a lot of the abrupt forces out, which made it the classic ride that it was. Plus, the topography of the land, it was built half way on a hill and half way off. None the less, I would love to see it rebuilt somewhere. I'd love to see some kind of private funding. There was a park in California that closed in 1976 called Belmont in San Diego, and they had a classic coaster there. What they did was they formed a Save the Coaster Committee in 1983. Here it is 1991. That coaster is totally rebuilt, beautiful, runs beautiful, a great ride. They have little shops like a mall, about five or six outlets, a carousel, palm trees, right on the bay. No proposed park, but they still have the Giant Dipper Rollercoaster running. That would be great just to see the Wild Cat

rebuilt with little concessions. Just to make it a nice little park, and if you want to go ride the coaster, pay two dollars, which people will do if it's rebuilt. I just don't see it happening here because it's hard to get funding and it's hard to get volunteers or something like that. But, I know there is an ongoing interest in Idora. I know there are a lot of people out there that miss it. If any kind of documentary film or book comes out, I'm sure that it will be on a lot of people's agendas to get because you can only rely on memories. So, you have to look back on another source.

You can imagine how many people have old photographs, Super-8 movies, brochures, souvenirs in their homes. That was one of the worst things that happened to me was that 1984 was the last year you could go, and I never took any pictures until after the park was down. I never bought any souvenirs. That stuff would be worth a million dollars to me right now if I had them.

S: In conclusion, is there anything else you would like to say about the park?

H: Long live Idora! If there is any kind of preservation that would be initiated into the community here, I'd be one of the people up front to see the efforts get through and hopefully bring back a little bit of a treasure that can't be replaced.

S: Yes. Well, thank you for doing the interview, Mark.

H: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW