

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Idora Park

Personal Experience

O. H. 1464

NORMA J. CARNEY

Interviewed

by

Scott Smith

on

November 28, 1991

NORMA JEAN CARNEY

Born on the east side of the city of Youngstown, Ohio, Norma Jean Carney has led a life full of many ups and downs. In her youth, she lived in an area where a relatively meager income was the norm, and she and her family were a little below the norm. She attended the Immaculate Conception School for grades one through eight--she still today has remained an active alumni of this school contributing to it several times a year--and spent her first two years of high school at Ursuline, which is a parochial school on the city's Northside.

Norma Jean was married to Francis Smith at the age of sixteen in the year 1954. The two would have four children: Kimberly, age 36, who is presently a housewife and lives in Cortland, Ohio; Mark, age 33, who is a Master Sergeant in the Air Force and is stationed in Fort Worth, Texas; Jamie, who is a Professor at Auburn University in Alabama; and Scott, who is presently finishing work on his Masters Degree in History. After ten and a half years of marriage, Francis and Norma Jean were divorced and went their separate ways. Within a few years, Norma Jean was again married, to Tom Moore; but this marriage would only last a few years before it, too, ended sadly in divorce.

Much changed after the end of Norma Jean's second marriage when she met Paul Carney, who was also coming off of a failed marriage. The two would eventually marry on November 11, 1974, and they are still together today. Norma Jean is presently the Administrative Assistant to the Dean of YSU's Graduate School. This is a position she has held for several years. Her husband

Paul is now owner of Carney Plastics, which is located in Youngstown, Ohio; and he is very involved in many community activities. Norma Jean Carney is also involved in several organizations including toe A.C.L.U. and N.O.W.

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INTERVIEWEE: NORMA J. CARNEY
INTERVIEWER: Scott Smith
SUBJECT: Idora Park, Ursuline, Youngstown's History,
and social activities in the city
DATE: November 28, 1991

S: This is an interview with Norma Jean Carney for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Idora Park project, by Scott Smith, at Mrs. Carney's house, which is 17722 Edgewater Drive, in Lake Milton, Ohio, on November 28, 1991, at 6:40 p.m.

Okay, before we start discussing Idora Park, I'd like to discuss: your past history, where you grew up, have you always been a resident of Youngstown, where you went to school, and what your children are doing, things like that. Just real, in general. So, if you'd like to start from the beginning.

C: I grew up on the east side of Youngstown, and I went to Immaculate Conception School. I was born in Maryland--Cumberland, Maryland. But, I never lived there. My mom just went home to her family when she was pregnant, and she had me there. I went to Ursuline. I didn't finish school. I went two years at Ursuline and got married when I was sixteen. [I] had four children.

S: How many people are in your family?

C: What do you mean? Do you mean brothers, sisters?

S: Yes.

C: There were four children in my family. I was the oldest. One boy, three girls. I was thinking about a boy who is still stinky. Of course, because he was a boy, that was the. . . . But, where we grew up on the Eastside, you probably wouldn't want to walk there in the daytime, now.

S: What neighborhood is that?

C: Neighborhoods in that lower, lower, lower Eastside. Immaculate is right at the end of the Oak Street Bridge, Immaculate Conception. In fact, that's one of the schools that the Diocese keeps trying to close because they're out of money. They've got an Alumni Association, which I donate to a couple of times a year, two or three times a year. I send them something, and they. . . . But, I think that's how the school is staying open. People are just. . . the Eastside was a real strong neighborhood, real strong community.

S: Was it ethnic, or was it a mixture?

C: Yes. It's almost all Italian. The Eastside is almost all Italians. There was only a couple Irish families there and possibly some Slovak families. I know that when I was a kid I always felt embarrassed because my mother, when we had a treat for school, would bake chocolate chip cookies. Everybody else brought homemade pizza. I really felt inadequate. I always wished that she could have made homemade pizza. But, it was sort of like belonging to a club, and still is.

It's been thirty or thirty-five years, maybe longer since I've lived on the Eastside. Actually, I lived on the Eastside after I was first married, too. So, it may not have been that long. Probably about thirty years. I still see people, and it's like old-home week. There's a real strong sense of family from that side of town. I don't know if it was because they were almost all Italians, and it was. . . . We went to Immaculate together; and then, some of the kids went to East, and others went to Ursuline. People I went to grade school with, there were probably about ten, twelve girls. We still see each other. We see each other about once or twice a year. Some live in California, other parts of Ohio, but we still get together.

S: What was the city of Youngstown like growing up?

C: It was totally different, of course. Downtown was the hub of everything, and you walked to town. We used to. . . we didn't live far from town; and we would go

to the show on Sunday afternoon, and we would walk downtown. [We would] catch a bus on occasion. Sometimes, you would buy a pass, and the pass was good to ride anywhere. I think a pass was a quarter, but I can't remember. You could ride everywhere, and to ride on the bus was a big treat. You would get on the bus and ride to the end of the line.

Of course, my father was a bus driver. And sometimes, we would go with him on his route. We'd sit behind him and ride off to the end of the line, but most times, we walked downtown. We got twenty cents to get into the show and sometimes a nickel for candy. And, that was great! You saw a double feature, and you saw news and special features and previews.

You went to a theater that was absolutely breathtakingly beautiful. I'm not sure that The Palace was prettier than Powers Auditorium, which was Warner's; but it was gorgeous! Beautiful, beautiful, elaborate restrooms. The decor was gorgeous. It was built and [had] plush carpeting in beautiful colors. And, of course, even the ushers were dressed up. We usually got dressed up, too. We didn't go to the show in blue jeans. Then, we had neighborhood theaters. Wilson Theater was down . . . I guess it was about six or eight blocks from us on Wilson Avenue, and we would go there on Sunday afternoon. Well, I saw lots and lots of musicals--Doris Day and Gordon McCray, and of course, Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly, and lots of dancing and singing, which were my favorites. I love those.

S: What else would you do growing up? Did you guys play games, play any sports, do anything like that in your neighborhood?

C: I certainly did. I was a tomboy. I played baseball and football, and beat everybody up in a four block radius. I was bad. I was a tomboy. I was really, probably one of the toughest kids in the neighborhood. We played Release the Den, Kick the Can.

S: Which is--what's Release the Den?

C: Well, you have something that was a home base, like a telephone pole, and you had two teams. You caught people, and you brought them in; and they had to stand at the telephone pole, and someone from their team had to run to the end without getting tagged and hit the pole. Then, that was the Release the Den, and everybody got to run loose again. Kick the Can was somewhat similar. You would run in and kick . . . when you go in close enough you could kick the can; then you released all your guys, and they all ran loose again. We

played Red Rover, "Red Rover, let Johnny come over." Everybody locked hands; and then, the guy from across the way ran over and tried to bust through. I wasn't very good at that. I was skinny. So, I was not real good at holding or busting through, actually.

S: When you were growing up, what was it like at Ursuline, your two years at Ursuline?

C: Just like going to college. Everybody was real conscious of being Freshman, Sophomore, Juniors, and Seniors; and I don't remember it being that way at other schools.

S: It still is.

C: Is it? They were real aware of the class they were in. It was an excellent school. There were . . . of course, then, there were a lot more nuns teaching than there are now. There's one nun per school now--and those women didn't do anything but teach.

I thought we got a good education in the parochial grade school, because the other kids that went to East High from Immaculate coasted for a year before they caught up. I don't think that's the same kind of education, now. But, I loved it. We went to football games, and we were real gung-ho about the football team. I enjoyed myself. I had a lot of fun.

S: How many children do you have?

C: I have four.

S: And, they're doing?

C: They're doing well! I have two kids that are married of . . . well, the son is married and has a little girl. He married a British girl. He's very, very happy. Wonderful husband and father, turned into a really nice man. Somebody you would like to spend time with. My oldest daughter is married and has three children. In fact, so is the woman that is in Texas, my oldest son's girl. But, all of them are in the Gifted and Talented Program. They all get straight A's and they're very bright. I tell my kids that that's a genetic skip. They just went right over the parent's generation from the grandmother to the grandchildren. And, my middle daughter has her PhD, and she's teaching at Auburn. My youngest son, my baby, is working on his master's degree. He's president of Student Government of his University, and [he is] on the Board of Trustees and doing very well. He's terribly handsome and charming and has lots of personality.

S: So, we'll start with your earliest memories of Idora Park, and you feel free to talk about anything. Talk about entertainment in the city and other things that you've seen in the city, things, anything that you would tie in with Idora Park or anything in the city of Youngstown itself. But also, mainly, we're going to talk about Idora Park. What are your earliest memories of the park?

C: Going on the bus to the park; and of course, it was the Idora Bus. You know how they have the name on the front. It was Idora, and I think somebody was saying earlier it was number twenty. It was the end of the line, and that certainly seemed as though that was the longest ride in the world. By the time you got there, you were beside yourself. You couldn't stand it. You were just. . . . I remember that, and I remember the penny arcade, which I loved. And, we were very poor when I was young. So, I never had a lot of money; but I can remember going to that penny arcade and being sure I could use that shovel thing, that clamp or claw thing, and win prizes. Now, you have to remember, for as much a toughy as I was, I was deathly afraid of rides and suffered terribly from motion sickness. In fact, by the time I'd get there on the bus, probably I would be a little queezy and could not ride on much. I think I was a grown woman before I got on the Jack Rabbit, which was the smaller of the two roller coasters. It was the baby roller coaster.

I don't think I realized as a kid just how well known that park was and what a wild roller coaster the Wild Cat was. We would go, too. . . . I think they had Parochial School Day. They would have CCO or CCY, or whatever the heck that Catholic Youth Organization was; and then, the rides would be reduced, or else you'd buy a ticket, and you would go all day on one fee. The french fries, of course--I'm sure everybody you've talked to about Idora Park talks about the french fries--they were wonderful.

S: When you would go there as a child, was that a big deal? Was that a big thing?

C: Oh my gosh, yes. It was, like once a year, a treat that was unheard of. I remember my grandfather, my pappy Norris, taking us. He would take us. He would. . . . He wore a flat straw hat--I think it's called a boater--but he always wore it. In the summer time, his whole wardrobe changed, and he wore a flat straw hat. It was like a rope and braid of straw. It was really. . . . He was very natty. He was a character and a bit of a drinker who would get real rowdy when he had a few too many. He was real good to us, and he loved the park. He would take us there.

I loved the Fun House, of course. And, I did the most daring thing, I rode . . . what I rode the most often, of course, was the boats. We would go through the dark tunnel, and I'm sure that I got kissed in there when I was a little older. I think that was a place where you would take a girl. You never went anywhere with a boy, but there was a bunch of girls there and a bunch of boys there. You might end up walking through there together; and then, you ride through there with some boy, and you get a kiss. I'm sure that today's generation would think that was terribly mild. We thought it was wildly daring. Of course, we played golf there. Everybody played miniature golf there. That was wonderful. I can remember being a grown up and riding that stupid caterpillar and getting so sick [that] I threw up on the midway.

S: You're the first person that mentioned playing miniature golf at the park, in two years of doing interviews, and I brought it up with one other person. But, it seems that, that's something that is really forgotten.

C: I loved to play miniature golf! I loved it! Yes. In fact, that's the last . . . well, maybe it's not the last thing I did. But, it was . . . I mean, I was seeing the man I'm married to now, and went there, and played miniature golf for sure. That was . . . And, then the park in later years, became a place where you went to--I just remembered going there from High School (laughter), going to Sock Hops and doing the Bunny Hop. I can remember when the very first time [that] it was introduced. We were there. And, of course, our hot shot disc jockey, who was the Boots Bell of his time, was Dan Ryan, which shows you how old I am. But, they literally took their shoes off and danced in their socks. We learned to do the bunny hop, and we thought that was wonderful! We would go down and see Dan Ryan. Because we went to school at Ursuline, we would go downtown after school.

We would go to his radio station, and we'd would stand outside the booth. It was all glass, and we would stand there and talk to him. He'd come out and chit-chat with us.

S: Was he like the big item . . . ?

C: Oh, sure. We didn't think he was . . . you know, we weren't crazy about him, but he was just the in thing to do.

S: He was pretty cool.

C: Yes. One afternoon we were down there, three of us--three or four of us, me and my two very bosom buddies, Dorothy and Patty; and he said a new singer was coming in and his fan club was going to be there. He said it looked as though nobody was going to show up, and [asked] would we mind kind of hanging around until he [the singer] got there because he [the singer] was a pretty nice guy and it would make him [the singer] feel good. And, the girls would . . . his fan club girls. . . . So, they arrived. There were two or three of them; and then, the singer arrived. He [the singer] was a really funny looking guy, but [he was] just as sweet and charming as he could possibly be. He had a hit single out called "Rags to Riches," and his name was Tony Bennett. He was darling, and we all got his autograph, which I've since lost. But, it was lots of fun. I thought about that afterwards, and we thought, he'd never go anywhere. He had a perfectly flat head and [was] the funniest looking guy.

But, I remember the Sock Hops all the time at the Ball Room there. You have a lot of memories of the place; and now that I'm older, I can't remember what came first. Of course, I remember fishing. And, I remember with my kids, letting them fish.

S: You mean the gold fish, the thing that rotated?

C: No, that little thing that. . . . Yes, that little, like a little tank that went around and around with little plastic things in it [that] you caught with a magnet.

S: And, you couldn't lose.

C: Never. No, you couldn't lose. Except, you probably paid a quarter to do it; and then, their gift cost three cents. But, it didn't matter. You won wonderful things.

S: As you got older, let me see. . . . Did the park then, become more of a social place than a fun place, more of a place to go socialize?

C: Sure. People went there to dance. They got dressed up and went out to dance. I guess that was a little older generation. I never was a dancer. I never did dance well. But, you went there on dates. You went. . . . I mean, after we were married, when I was a young married person, lots of times we'd get together, and we'd go there. That would be a place we'd go. Sometimes, you never got on anything. You went there, parked your car, and you walked through. Maybe you got

a custard, or you got the famous french fries or cotton candy or something. And, we just walked through the park.

S: Would you ever go to, like, the Hidleberg Gardens?

C: Oh sure. Yes, we drank beer and ate peanuts.

S: Did you take your children there often?

C: Not often. Sad to say, that when my children were small, we were as poor as I had been when I was small. So, we didn't get to go places like that very often; but we did go. I don't have a lot of memories of taking them. I remember the Bumper Cars, too. I can remember doing that when I was much older. I loved the Bumper Cars. There was a limit to what I could ride. My friends would go on the Wild Cat, and then everybody would say, "You're a big sissy. You're a chicken." And I would say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Who cares?" (laughter) I was, I guess, sure enough of myself that I didn't care what anybody thought. Nobody ever talked me into doing anything I didn't want to do. I don't know how I got on the Jack Rabbit. I have a feeling it might have been with my husband. I think that he might have been the one that would have been able to convince me. I felt really, very daring! And, talking to roller coaster riders, that's a sissy ride that you could do standing up.

S: But, it was a good coaster.

C: Yes, well, it was a big deal for me.

S: What else was there to do in Youngstown? What were other social--the hot spot places to go?

C: Well, there used to be a thing when I was at Ursuline. We would have dances at the YWCA, and there were a lot of clubs at Ursuline. We had one, of course. Everybody else had initials that meant something secret. Ours had a name; which of course, I'm embarrassed to repeat. We were the Little Slicks. (laughter) We had letters on our jackets. We all had matching Oxford jackets, and they said "Little Slicks" and had "LSMFT: Little Slicks Mean Finer Things." Of course, that was the Lucky Strike [cigarettes] commercial of the time. We gave a dance, and you always had to have some kind of a little gimmick that you pinned on to your clothing that--and I can't, for the life of me now, think what ours was. I don't remember. But, when you got there, you paid your business at the door; and then, they gave you this thing, and they pinned it on you so that everybody would know that you paid. And, it always had to be something terribly clever. Well, it was so

clever, I can't even remember what it was. I have a picture of us together. Now, I watch television, and I see things like Brooklyn Bridge, and these shows. And, I laugh, because there we are! I look at this picture of us all sitting at this table, and we're sillier than hell. We look crazy!

S: Did you see a lot of the same people you went to Immaculate with? They went also, still went to Ursuline with you?

C: Yes. Some of them went to East, but most of them went to Ursuline. Those are the same girls, and they're all Eastside kids. It really was. . . . Of course, Ursuline was very clannish, too. Kids from St. Ed's all stuck together. The kids from St. Pat's and from Southside did, too. The kids from the Eastside, we all hung out together.

S: Did you guys go to Idora Park? Did you ride the bus there when you were in High School? Did you drive there? How would you usually get there when you were in High School?

C: Well, occasionally we got there in a car. But, not too often. There were no where near as many cars around. We had a buddy who had a little Coupe, a Plymouth Coupe. I tried to think now. I don't know how we got in that car! I have no recollection now. . . . It must have had a back seat. It must have been a total. . . . Because, when I was young I had a friend who had a Coupe with a rumble seat that you opened up to what looked like the trunk to you kids. The trunk flipped down, and there was a place to sit; but you were outside the car. But, he had that little car, and I know that. When it would rain, we all had to stuff our scarfs and everything in the windshield because it leaked. But, we would go with him to Idora Park. He would take us. But, I just remember most going on the bus. Even with my parents or with my . . . I can remember my grandmother and I, I think, going on the bus and having to ride all that way because we would go from where we lived. We would take the bus downtown. Then, we would get on the bus; and then, we would go all the way to the end of the line. That doesn't seem so far now, but my God, it seemed like the end of the world when we were young.

S: Would you sometimes work to sasve up money to go?

C: No. In my day, no one worked. You [had a] wind fall and borrowed. You got money from somebody or something. We did occasionally, because we lived so far down on the Eastside. We would collect scrap iron and go to the junk yard and sell scrap iron. Somebody had

a wagon, and we would rub it in the dirt to try and make it heavier before we took it to the junkyard to make it worth more money. We would get me--we had a get rich quick scheme once, where we cut lilacs off someone's lilac bushes and wrapped them in cigarette silver on the bottom. [We] put ribbon on them and tried to sell them for corsages. That didn't last very long, and we didn't make any money at that. We'd also collect bottles. I think if you talked to anyone our age, we collected bottles, turned those in. It had to be a special occasion or a . . . like I said, my grandfather, maybe he would have one too many and load us all in his car. Or else, I found a bus, and we'd go.

S: How did your sisters and your brother feel about the park? Was it the same for them? Was it, like a big part of it?

C: Yes, I'm sure it was. Of course, Aggie was a baby; and I'm sure, Aggie doesn't have as many memories of it as we do, because Agg's about ten years younger than I am. But, Bridgie is very daring. She would ride all the rides.

S: That's not surprising.

C: Yes, she would. She'd ride the rides. She probably would, now! Bridgie was a wonderful dancer. She liked to dance. She went to East. She was the only one of us that went to East High. She didn't go to Ursuline. But, I can't remember them being with me so much. I just remember waiting for people to get off the rides because I didn't go on hardly anything. Isn't that strange, though, that I liked that place so much and I didn't get to ride it, ride on anything?

S: Did you even go there as an adult? Was it still the same type of, like I said, that it was a social setting, now?

C: Yes. Well, they kept making changes. I can remember when I was very young, of course, there was a swimming pool there. I don't really know this to be for sure, but I think that the reason the swimming pool had to be closed was because of race problems, because it had been white. It seems to me it had an island in the center of it, a round cement thing people swim out to. I don't ever remember swimming there.

S: Do you know that it was a salt water pool?

C: Was it?

S: Yes.

C: That's fascinating. I didn't know that. But, I think it was closed because of race problems. I remember that. But, I know that we continued to go there for years. People would go there, walk around and eat. There were little changes over the years, things they added, things they did differently; and it bothered people. I think I rode the Ferris Wheel a couple of times, not too many times. I only rode that Caterpillar once because I got deathly sick. I'm trying to remember what else I rode. I went in the Fun House several times. The Bumper Cars, I rode every time I went there. Even as a grown up, I rode the Bumper Cars.

S: You said the arcade was one of your favorites. Did you ever watch little movies they had in there and things like that?

C: No, I can't remember that.

S: The penny movies?

C: I do know we got our picture taken. There were picture places to get your picture taken everywhere, downtown Youngstown and in the Ten Cent stores; and there was there [Idora Park], too. I know we had pictures. It seems to me, now that we're talking about that, that we have a picture of Bridgie and Johnny and Aggie together. I was thinking that was where it was taken, at Idora Park. Where did the name come from?

S: Idora?

C: Yes.

S: The Falls Park Company was the Company that opened it up.

C: Was it Idora? Is that what it came from--I Adore A Park?

S: It could be I Adore A Park, or Idora might have been the name of one of the wives of the six owners. I'm trying to think.

C: Nobody knows for sure.

S: There's also an Idora Falls in Mill Creek Park.

C: Oh, really?

S: We don't know which name came first. There's three or four different ways that they think it got its name. One of them also being that there was a contest in the city to name the park on something dealing with one of

the teachers with the first name Idora or combinations of the name Ida and Dora. So, they don't know. I think Dr. Shale feels that Idora [came] from Idora Waters Falls or some place in Mill Creek Park called Idora. That's what he thinks the name is, now.

C: I can think about it, and when we're talking about it, it seems quiet. But, if you stop and think about it, I can remember walking there; and you can hear the roller coasters and the Wild Cat, the people screaming and yelling and holding their hands up. I still, to this day, love to go to any amusement park and watch the rides. I love to watch the rides. I love to see the people's faces. I like to look at them.

S: What other memories do you have of the park, or events or occasions, that have stayed in your mind?

C: The last time--well, it may not be the last time. I think it was. But, the last time I was there, I came home from work one night, and there was an enormous travel bus parked in front of my house. So, you have to realize that I live on a little half a block, and there's only two houses, three houses on my block. It dead ends in the water. I couldn't imagine what was going on. I came in, and everybody was all excited and carrying on. It seems that Maynard Furgesson was visiting the people next door. He was playing at the Ball Room that night with his band. We spent the afternoon with them. My husband and a couple of guys, and they water skied.

S: Who else was with him?

C: Well, when he was here, the Doc--they called him--he traveled with them. I think he supplied them with drugs, personally.

S: He's from. . . .

C: Pittsburgh.

S: Pittsburgh?

C: Pittsburgh, yes. He came down here, and. . . . See, the girls that were traveling with him were sisters of the girl that lived next door to us. So, he invited us to be his guests that night at Idora Park. We went, and he had a table all set up for us. Well, see, when we arrived there, we realized that he was playing with a very well known drummer. When we were sitting at our table, there at the side of the stage there was a dressing room there. The door was open, and his well-known drummer was in there in his underwear.

S: Name of the. . . .

C: Buddy Rich. He was either high or drunk, one of the two. I don't know. But, boy, he was having a heck of a time getting his pants on. He couldn't get his foot in the leg. He had little blue knit briefs on, and he was quite a sight. So, we were sitting there hysterical, and he happened to look up and see us. He was mad beyond belief. He came over and slammed the door on us. But, I have to say that it was a wonderful night of music. I mean, Maynard Furgesson is just wonderful, and he was a really nice guy. Just a really, really sweet guy. Buddy Rich, I can't say the same for. But, it was a great night of entertainment. I never expected to. . . . I still have the T-shirt. That was years ago, but I still have it. I hate to throw it away.

S: Did you see any other bands come through Idora Park?

C: Well, I didn't dance, so I didn't go to see them. But, I know that everybody I know went to dances there. People went. There were formals there so many times a year. They had Christmas dances. I think that's where they held the Notre Dame dance--I'm not positive of that--which was a really big deal for all the kids that went to the Catholic School. That was a formal that everybody went to. I think my husband and his x-wife, they used to go. Then, people went to those things when we were young married people. Even when I first married my husband, we went to things. We wore long dresses, and capes or shawls and things, and little fur jackets and stuff.

S: Does Youngstown have any place like that today that you do those type of things, really?

C: No. I don't know. If they have some place, I can't think of it off hand. It seems so innocent, so innocent. In the end it wasn't. In the end, I didn't even like to go--in the very end. And, I certainly would never have wanted my kids to go. There were gangs and people roaming through there. The neighborhood was middle class for years and years and years. Then, as the middle class moved further out, further South into Boardman, that neighborhood became bad; and kids roamed through it. It seems to me, in the end, they tried to fence it in.

S: Yes.

C: You had to pay to get in, just as you do at the big amusement parks. You paid one price and got in. Then, [you] did whatever you wanted to. Well, that wasn't fun because, for somebody who doesn't ride--although I

have gone to Cedar Point and paid to get in and walk around and eat their food and enjoy looking at everything. So, you were less likely to go out there and just spend an evening walking around buying those french fries. . . .

S: How would you compare Idora to Cedar Point?

C: Well, as I said before, I guess innocence is what I really think about. It is innocent. I smell of hot cars and food and french fries. It was. . . . It's not that small, certainly. But, it was like a corner of Cedar Point. It seems as though amusement parks now just spend more and more and more and more to try and outdo each other, and become. . . . Well, just like kids toys now. They're so complicated. Everybody's. . . . It seemed that we had a good time more easily, then. We didn't need so much entertaining. You had a fun . . . we played simple games. I don't ever hear kids outside playing those games, now. I don't hear kids running and playing in their yard. I don't hear people calling, parents calling kids to come in at night. We had to come in when the street lights came on. When it was warm and everybody was sitting on the porch steps talking to all the mothers, we could stay out and play longer because they were out there. We would run and play until we were all sweaty and dirty and. . . . That didn't happen. Of course, my kids played "Hide 'n Go Seek" when they were young. It wasn't all that long ago, and they played with an adult friend staying with us for a while, after she'd had some surgery. Her and her daughter and all the kids would play "Hide 'n Go Seek" in the neighborhood, run around like crazy people. But, I don't think they do so much of this. No. Now, twelve or fourteen year old girls are dating. They're wearing make-up and spraying their hair. We were such innocents.

S: Do you think that some place like Idora Park could stay in business today?

C: No. I don't think so. I don't think it could keep them occupied.

S: You think today that they're too busy going to malls and playing Nintendo?

C: I don't. . . . Yes. Oh, definitely. I've said that kids, now--the parents, because of the economic situation, parents, mothers are just about forced to work. Nobody's mother worked, then. My mother did when her and my father separated; but up to that point, hardly anyone you knew worked. Even in a poor neighborhood like that. The lady next door worked in a laundry, which was really awful. It was dreadful. She

worked--she would come home worn to a frazzle. But, that was not common. That was not the norm. So, I think that kids. . . . I mean, my God, I was in the ninth grade in High School before I could wear lip stick; and then, I had to sneak it most of the time. It was a really big deal. Now, in sixth or seventh grade, these little kids are. . . . Parents allow them, I think, because they're overwhelmed with guilt because they don't spend any time with them. They allow them to wear clothes that I consider far too adult, too revealing, and I don't think Idora Park would be anywhere near enough for them. They'd be bored with Idora Park, I'm afraid.

S: Do you think even if they had the Wild Cat and the Lost River and things like that, that those still. . . . That wouldn't be enough?

C: No, I don't think so. No, why would they. . . . They would go to Cedar Point, so they could get their. . . . You know, it's not enough to be thrilled or to be excited, to be frightened. It's, you've got to be frightened out of your mind. You have to ride the biggest roller coaster in the world. You have to go. . . .

S: You have to rent "Friday the 13th" instead of just a good scary movie. Now, they have to show them the blood and guts and all that stuff.

C: Yes. We went to the theater and saw those movies and, my God! I mean, I watch them now, and I love them because they're old. I'm sure there are some people that still would like to see them, but no kid would sit through those. [They were too] mushy. I mean, people weren't even allowed--the husbands and wives that played husbands and wives in movies weren't allowed in the same bed. For years, they had to be in separate beds. Now, on MTV, you can see more than you could see in a movie then, in your whole life.

S: How much has the city, itself changed? How much has it changed since you were young?

C: Well, when I was young, you went downtown for every thing. You went downtown to shop. You went downtown to go to the movie, to the theater. That was even up until I was a young married person. Downtown was full of stores. They decorated for Christmas, and you went downtown to see the windows. When my children were little, we went down to see Santa Clause in Strouss because he was the nicest Santa Clause. I always told them that was the real Santa Clause at Strouss. The rest of them were imitations, and you could tell. We went--every night after school, we went downtown. We

went to Hollander's until Ursuline wasn't allowed in Hollander's anymore because they acted up; and then, we went to the Dutch House, which was on one of the side streets--I forget the name of it--and we had french fries and gravy. We'd make cokes. Sometimes when we could afford it, we had a hamburger. I usually didn't. And, you caught the bus home. Everybody from Ursuline, [that] went downtown, they dispersed from there. They caught busses home because it was the only Catholic High School in town.

S: There was not Cardinal Mooney?

C: No. No Mooney. And after football games, we walked downtown. We would play at South High, and we would walk down over the bridge. We would go to the hot dog place [Jay's] at the end of town. I can't remember the name of it, now. We would get hot dogs; and if it was Friday night, we would get hot dogs and malts until it was after midnight, so we could eat them. It would be Saturday morning, and we'd have these hot dogs with chili sauce. But, that was . . . I mean, we would go to walk to football games at Rayen. Then, we'd walk back to Ursuline. We had dances at Ursuline. After the games, we'd go to the dance or a dance at the Y [YWCA] downtown. And, that was . . . you would never, ever consider walking any of those places, now. And, there were . . . certainly, it was mixed on the East-side and the Northside, but not to the extent it is now. It was mixed. It was not totally black; and I don't say that you have to be afraid just because it is black, but there's a different element of people living there now.

S: Than before?

C: Right.

S: How important do you think Idora Park was to Youngs town?

C: Oh Lord, I bet if you took. . . . As I said, I, first of all, didn't stay single as long as a lot of the kids did. But, I bet if you talked to everybody, they have wonderful memories of dances there and going on dates, and meeting people. I remembered those Sock Hop things. I loved those. That was great! Even if you didn't dance, you went there and had a wonderful time. That was something else! You went to dances all the time, and lots of people [who] went to dances, never danced. That was just what we did. We went to Burkley Woods in the summer. I think Burkley Woods was on Saturday night or Friday or Saturday night; and we all went there--there was a big open pavilion people danced in--and hung around and drank coke and met boys or

girls, or whatever. But, I think that's the role that Idora Park. . . . That was a big time date, boy! You'd go to Idora Park, go on the rides, get your date something to eat, go to the penny arcade, play one of the games, try to win something for her. I'm trying to remember now. It seems there was a place to go picnic, too.

S: Up on that hill.

C: Yes. Up behind everything, there was a place that usually had picnic tables and things, and you could go. I know that the whole family went once. I can remember that . . . and a picnic there. My cousins and aunts and uncles were in from Maryland, and we went. That was a big time deal for them, because the town I was born in Maryland is real small, totally. But, I would imagine, in my age group--and perhaps even just a little younger, maybe five years. . . . And then after that, I don't talk to as many kids. I mean, I have a girlfriend who's about forty-one or forty-two. She doesn't have the memories of Idora Park. She didn't go the way we did. You know, go when the whole school goes.

S: I remember the first person I went on the Wild Cat with was Joe Frush.

C: Oh, your friend from school.

S: From St. Dominic's. But, even when. . . well, I know when I went to Jackson, when we would run past here for cross country practice and stuff--they used to have those big things where the bands would come in and play, and stuff--I remember running past here down the road races. It's weird to think that, like I just quit going there after a certain point in time. I just quit going.

C: Well, they have antique shows there and Christmas shows, and sales.

S: Did you go to one of those?

C: No. And then, they brought teams in. They brought baseball teams. I can remember, the All Women's team came in. I guess that. . . . Well, I never did get to see one of those games. But, I talked to people afterwards, and I guess the woman that pitched was really great. They would have those things. No, I didn't go to too much. Well, when I was a young married person, I had absolutely no money at all. I cannot remember taking my kids there when they were real, real, real little.

S: Do you think there's anything around today that even takes the place of Idora Park?

C: Well, I guess Cedar Point. But, you can't do that on a Saturday afternoon, that's for sure. You can't get in a car and run to Cedar Point on a Saturday afternoon.

S: And, you got to have a hundred bucks to go do it.

C: Well, they do things like, all the Yuppies take their kids to White House Fruit Farm and think that's a day in the country. That's got real Yuppified. You go to Boardman Park for the Pumpkin, the Halloween walk, or whatever. I don't know what people do with their kids, those kinds of things. I'm almost worried that they don't do anything with them. We did stuff with our kids when they were in High School, even. We went for Pumpkins and cider and doughnuts. We didn't hang out with our kids all of the time, but we did different kinds of things. Now, when I talk to friends that have teenage children, they say that they're embarrassed. They wouldn't want to go with them. They wouldn't want to go places with them. They wouldn't want to spend that kind of time. We always had a lot of fun with the kids. We always had a lot of fun.

S: Do you think that today then, that's something that's really missing in the city of Youngstown?

C: Yes! Well, the city of Youngstown is. . . . The city of Youngstown, now is virtually. . . . I mean, lets be honest. There's nothing but poor people in the city of Youngstown. There is a few areas. Around Mill Creek Park, there's a little bit of, you know. . . . Police-men and firemen live there where. . . . In fact, Ray Slovin lived over there. But now, homes are real nice, and they stay. . . . It's kind of a tragedy, because the downtown was so . . . it was such a hub of activity. I mean, you went downtown to see and be seen. You got dressed up to go downtown, boy. We wore gloves. We'd get all dressed up. It was wild, but Idora Park is a very fine memory.

But, I don't think that Idora Park. . . . I think they'd be bankrupt, now. I don't think anyone would go there. I think, first of all, the area is so bad that they'd have to build a barricade around it. Then, you'd have to have a parking lot with a guard. You'd be afraid to go. People wouldn't go and take their small children. They'd be afraid to go there.

S: Tom Martindale told me that that was maybe one of the best places to go parking, was their parking lot at Idora Park, he said.

C: Oh, yeah? Lord knows.

S: He said, "Nobody bothered you. You didn't have to worry about anything."

C: See, I never got that far. I was married by the time I was sixteen. I was sixteen years old, and seventeen when I had my first child. So, I didn't get to do too much of that.

S: So, you really don't feel that Idora Park would do business today, though?

C: No. No, if it were located in some other part of the city, perhaps. If it was maybe closer to downtown where they could do what the University is doing, build regular parking lots around it. It's got to be untouched. But, I don't see people. . . . I think they were already in deep financial trouble. The people were . . . because I know that we didn't go in the end because you feel threatened when. . . .

S: Too many gangs and stuff going through there.

C: Yes. Gangs of kids roam through some place, yelling and laughing and pushing and making rude remarks. People feel threatened. Not that there wasn't anyone there that would . . . you know, any kind of security, but I think that kind of thing is gone. The theaters are not the same. You don't go to those beautiful, gorgeous theaters and have those enormous screens. Now, you sit in these little closet things with the little tiny, postage stamp screen, and you have thirty theaters in one building. That's not. . . . I mean, when we went to the theater, we got up and ran back and forth a hundred times to the restroom pop stand to get water. Again, it was a case of see and be seen. It was a lot more social than it is now. I don't know that kids do that so much now.

S: Do you think the differences is. . . . I know, I think the difference between Idora Park and Cedar Point is--one's the antiseptic clean park with a theme, with the technologically superior rides. . . .

C: That's what I mean. You've got to be bigger, better. Bigger, better Benjamin.

S: Idora Park was just, it was a personality. But, it was always a never changing. It was always still the midway, and whether it was called the Crazy Horse Saloon or Hidleberg Gardens--whatever the name--it was still there. If you came back to Youngstown twenty-five years from now it's still there.

C: Did they change the name from Hidleberg Gardens later?

S: Yes, at the end it was the Crazy Horse Saloon.

C: Oh, how sad.

S: But, it wasn't the Hidleberg Gardens to begin with, either.

C: Wasn't it? (laughter)

S: No.

C: That's all I remember is the Hidleberg Gardens. It was very pretty, and it was that consistency every single solitary year, going back and everything was the same. It was very, very comforting. I don't know that kids want that now, either. How do they want that the sameness. . . . Cedar Point's nice. It's fun. But, you're right. It's antiseptic.

S: And, it costs too much money.

C: Yes. If you're poor, you don't go there. Well, the only difference is that whatever it cost to go to Idora Park when we were little was equally as expensive as it was to go to Cedar Point, by comparison. We were poor, and to have that much money was just impossible. We didn't have that kind of money.

S: Well, is there anything you would like to say in conclusion?

C: Well, sometimes you think about--you're a little nostalgic for those days. For the smells.

S: The french fries.

C: Yes.

S: Or even, the big pig that ate paper.

C: Yes, I forgot about that. Didn't they have some animal that blew up balloons, too?

S: I don't know. I know they had the pig and the lion, and they ate paper.

C: Ate paper. Yes, I forgot about that. I'm trying in my mind to picture the midway and where everything was. I know where the french fries were. I think about that now. Some of my fondest memories are those darn french fries. That's probably because I was not a rider. If I had been a rider, it would be different. I was more a watcher. Well, I'm really sorry I was not wealthy

enough to be able to go out there and buy up the Merry-go-round; or buy, at least, a horse off the Merry-go-round, or buy something, some tangible momentum or memento of your childhood. That would have really been nice.

S: Thank you.

C: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW