

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Idora Park Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1468

KATHRYN M. RICE

Interviewed

by

Scott Smith

on

October 30, 1991

KATHRYN RICE

Kathryn Rice was born Kathryn Zimmer, raised in Girard, Ohio where she spent her whole life in that community. She enjoyed growing up in that community, even though in the Depression times were very tight and it was many times a struggle to get by. Her mother raised Kathryn because her father died when she was very young. Mrs. Rice feels that as rough as times got, people still got by because they shared. When one person was down, the rest of the neighborhood helped them out, and so on. Mrs. Rice also pointed to a simpler time in her youth when games were simple and so were the times. Kathryn Rice also pointed to her mother running a boarding house to help get by with money and food. By having boarders, the family was always assured of having food and a place to live.

Kathryn attended Saint Rose school in Girard for grades one through eight. She attended Girard High School where she met her future husband, Herb Rice. During World War II, Kathryn worked as an inspector in a lamp factory. She was also waiting for Herb to come home from the Navy where he served from 1942 to 1946. The two were married in 1947, and they remain together today.

They have four children: Virginia, age 43, who is a school teacher at Saint Rose; Marjorie, age 41, who is a housewife living in Girard and has four children; Jean, age 40, who is a book editor living in Minneapolis; and Elaine, age 38, a nurse who is married, has four children and lives in Girard. Herb and Kathryn remain very active in their community, and are especially active in the Saint Rose Church.

--Scott Smith

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INTERVIEWEE: KATHRYN M. RICE

INTERVIEWER: Scott Smith

SUBJECT: Girard, Ohio, Saint Rose Church, Virginia,
Elaine, Marjorie, Boarding House, Klu Klux
Klan, the history of Idora Park

DATE: October 30, 1991

S: This is an interview with Kathryn Rice for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Scott Smith, on the Idora Park Project, at 937 Woodlawn, Girard, Ohio, on October 30, 1991, at one o'clock p.m.

Before we start our discussion about Idora Park, I would just first like to ask some questions about your own personal life. If you want to start from the beginning and get rolling: tell me about yourself and about where you grew up, if you have any children and everything else. Tell me about your children.

R: Okay, I'm a 70 year old mother, wife, housekeeper. We have four children--four daughters. Three are married and live in the area. One daughter is in Minneapolis. We keep in close touch with her by phone, talk to her very often. She's a real joy. I've lived in Girard all my life.

S: How about your other daughters?

R: One teaches school locally. One is the mother of four children; so needless to say, that keeps her busy. One works at the hospital as an L.P.N. She has a lovely, charming teenage daughter.

S: So, all but one of your children live in the area?

R: Right.

S: How's that on holidays? Do you always get everybody together on holidays?

R: We try very hard; but because of their busy schedules, it's getting more difficult with the hospital work. The mother of four has taken a part time job, so that limits her time. We try. We do the best we can. Very often, we get together. The out-of-towner, because she is more independent with no family, manages to get home each holiday.

S: Well that's good. The one that works at the school also gets around, right?

R: Yes.

S: She doesn't have as many responsibilities.

R: Right.

S: She doesn't have any kids, does she?

R: No. We have several step-grandchildren.

S: Step-grandchildren. And they're all probably wonderful [Laughter].

R: Oh yes, they're a real joy.

S: So, you've lived in Girard all your life.

R: Yes.

S: How was it growing up in Girard?

R: I had a fine time. [I had] lots of good friends. [I] kept busy. We had wiener roasts. We would get together--it was during the Depression. [Being] born in 1921, I hit that 1929 and 1930 just at an age where. . . . And, with no father . . . we had been poor before the depression hit, because my dad died before I was born. But Mom did a fine job of keeping us all together.

When we would get together to make fudge, one would bring sugar, one would bring cocoa, one would bring the milk. No one family could afford to put all of the ingredients out, but we managed. We shared and we enjoyed each other's company.

I remember as a child playing "Kick the Can", "Red Rover", "Run Sheepie Run". . . .

S: I don't know that one. How's that one go?

R: I have forgotten, but I know the sheep really meant the wimp. You know, "Run, sheepie, run"--sort of thing. But I have forgotten the basics. My brother would get those cartons, boxes that grapes came in, and he would pound a handle bar across the top. From scrap lumber, he would make a place to put your foot. He would hammer wheels from old roller skates, and we had scooters.

S: So people were a lot more practical?

R: Oh, yes. We soaped windows. [Laughter] We were mischievous; we soaped windows; we threw rotten tomatoes. We stole green apples. I had fun.

S: It was a lot different, though, than it is today?

R: Oh, yes. It was safe, then. We played under the street light. There were so few cars, you could even hear them coming. We played these games; you could run through neighbors' yards.

S: I think maybe--the word I'm thinking of--it was much slower. Things didn't move as fast. Would that be a way to explain it, do you think?

R: I'm sure they did not [move fast], because to wash clothes it would take my mom all day. You wrung the clothes through the wringer by hand, rather than throw a load in. So, you see, doing and taking them out--we hung them outdoors every possible chance. So, you could see how time consuming doing a family wash would be. You could see how time consuming [it was].

Now, I'm 70 and this doesn't apply to people in their 50s or so. But, when Mom baked bread, I remember her checking the temperature of the oven by sticking her elbow in. Now, we were poor. Our stove didn't have a thermometer.

S: How could you tell?

R: By guess and by golly. You know, practice. "That doesn't feel hot enough"--sort of thing.

S: Then, you'd turn it up a little bit?

R: That's right.

S: That's sort of how I cook with mine. I have a gas stove in my apartment, [and on] the dial, the numbers are worn off. But, I don't use my elbow. I put my hand in it, and if I think it's hot enough. . . .

R: Yes. How did we check the baby's bath water? I think we stuck our elbow in. The elbow, perhaps, is a sensitive area. I don't know. Everything was so much more time consuming. When you would go to paint, you didn't have the kinds of paints you have now--one coat covers, no smell sort of things. And housecleaning, God, you picked the rugs up, took them out on the line and beat them with a clothes beater.

S: That's how you cleaned the rugs?

R: Yes.

S: Wow. I've got my sweeper. I'll stick with my sweeper.

R: Okay. It has almost been established that was a cleaner way. Your floors got washed. Those rugs got changed. The dining room rug got put in the living room, and vice versa. So, the living room rug got worn in the middle. Next year, it was in the dining room, and the table sat over it. . . .

S: It got worn around.

R: It got worn around. Talk about E.P.A.; those people knew E.P.A.! In the rooms, actually, they have come to the conclusion that the rooms were cleaner.

S: Were the kids in your neighborhood real tight? Did you play with all of the kids in your neighborhood? Everybody was very close?

R: Yes. There was a bit more. . . . We lived in an Italian neighborhood, and we were not Italian. We were, truthfully, a cut above them. We played with them, but we didn't go into their homes too much. There were Irish and German just close enough. The Italian children were fine, but truthfully, we were lead to believe. . . . We went to the parochial school, they went to the public [school].

S: You're of German descent, right?

R: Yes, and Irish. Half and half.

S: Were there a lot of ethnic families in this area, like with the mills and everything?

R: Not a lot. At one time, there was a lot of Irish, German, and Slovenian. But when the Italians came some

time later, they came in droves, really. [On] our street--we were in the poorer section of town--[there were] nice Italian families, very good people, but there was

S: They were a lot different. They were direct from Italy? They had not been acclimated to the United States yet. Totally different people.

R: No. They spoke Italian in their homes.

S: Probably a lot of good food, though.

R: Yes, and they shared it. But they would say to me "(something Italian), Joseph?" I knew they meant, "Where is Joseph."

S: One of my best friends is from Girard. I went over to his house a couple of times, and his whole family speaks Italian. [They are] The Marianos. I took Italian as my language at the University, and I still don't understand what they say. I know, when he had his wedding, for his rehearsal dinner, they didn't get a restaurant. Instead, his family cooked. A lot of people came right over from Italy and they made . . . it was better than anything I ever had at a restaurant. It was, I think, the best food I ever had.

R: They are marvelous cooks.

S: It was great. So, you were pretty close in the neighborhood and everybody played together. They all bud-died around and stuff?

R: Yes.

S: Then, you went to Saint Rose?

R: Yes.

S: So, your whole family, you've been around Saint Rose all your life?

R: Right. I was baptized there.

S: Have you've seen it as a church and the school and everything, that it's changed a lot? Physically, has it changed a lot?

R: Physically, of course it has. Spiritually--of course, the Catholic church has changed--I think it's a marvelous. . . . There's a family feeling at Saint Rose that I think is great. I'm very satisfied with the changes.

S: Did they handle up until the senior year in high school?

R: No. Just through eighth grade.

S: Then you went to Girard High School?

R: Yes.

S: Was Girard High School a lot different than Saint Rose, or was it still a lot of the same people you went to Saint Rose [with] that went to Girard?

R: Yes. It was the entire city then. There again, see, the Catholics were looked down on. There was more prejudice, then. The Catholics were just not as great as the Protestants, as the W.A.S.P.s.

S: There was a lot of that, though?

R: Oh, yes.

S: Anything with like, the KKK or anything like that?

R: I remember Scott, when I was just four or five years old, down in our old city building--we, at that time, lived across the street from it--and I remember them burning a cross.

S: Really?

R: Yes, I can picture . . . I don't remember events leading to it or after it, but they had a little concrete bandstand, and I can still see that cross burning. That would be in 1924, 1925 or 1926.

S: So, there was some prejudice felt in this community?

R: Yes.

S: I find that really surprising. Well, I guess I don't. I've just never come in conflict with it. I think things are a lot different today.

R: Oh, yes, for the better.

S: Especially as far as religious. At that time, really, the Catholics were just starting to come with the Irish and the Italians and stuff. Catholics were just starting to come to the United States at that time, with immigration and everything.

R: That's right.

S: I know that there were a lot of organizations that even tried to keep the immigrants out, like the Know Nothings or people like that.

R: "The Irish Need Not Apply." I have heard that sign would be in Boston or New York. "The Irish Need Not Apply."

S: Now, was anything like that found in this area?

R: No. Not so conspicuous as that. But, it would be very difficult for a Catholic to get a teaching job in the Girard school system.

S: Just because they were Catholic?

R: Yes. The school board was made of. . . . They tried to keep a limit on that, but thank gosh that's past now.

S: So, you went to Saint Rose up until the eighth grade, and you saw a big difference education-wise when you went to Girard?

R: Not really.

S: Then, you went to Girard up until the twelfth grade. How was it at Girard? Did you like going to Girard?

R: Sure. There again, I had fun as a child. I didn't worry too much. I didn't get good grades, unfortunately. I was probably a "C" student. Velma was an "A" student; but I didn't see any profit in being an "A" student, so I had fun. I got "C's" because I really didn't care. I don't think I was stupid.

S: What did you do in high school for fun in the Girard community?

R: Well, there were a lot of school affairs. They had bonfires before the games, and there were their little girl reserves, and they had their dances. Like I said, we could spend an afternoon down in the city of Girard. There were several places to stop for your Coke or your ice cream. There was our Five and Ten. There was a couple of department stores and drug stores, and we--I know, on Sundays after church--went to this one Mullick's corner store and sat with a Coke. All of the guys from the Methodist Church, Herb included, would come up, and they'd get home and get scolded with, "Why did you stop and talk to those Catholics?" What else did we do during high school? [We had] a lot of roller skating.

S: Where would you roller skate at?

R: Avon Oaks, mostly. And there was a roller skating rink at Howland Springs.

S: I'm trying to think of where Avon Oaks is. Is there still a dance floor there?

R: Yes.

S: That's out in Niles?

R: On route 422, yes.

S: That was a popular place to go?

R: Yes, for roller skating. And there was a roller skating rink at Howland Springs. It sticks in my mind that the ultimate was when we went to Idora for skating.

S: What else did you do? Did you go to movies?

R: Sure, we had double features.

S: Do you remember any movies that would really stand out? This is going into social history. [Were there] any movies, or anything at the movies that you really remember? Anything that made going to the movies really special?

R: Well, during the war, of course, the best years of our lives, we cried. I remember the war pictures, because there were just so many of them. "Baton" and What were some of those other war pictures, Herb? "How Green was My Valley," about the Welsh miners. I had a friend who would call up and say, "Oh, Katherine, I feel like a good cry. Let's go to the movies." There were so many tear jerkers. But they always ended up. . . .

S: On a good note.

R: On a good note, yes.

S: How was it in this area during the war? How was it growing up during that time in American history?

R: There was a camp--Camp Reynolds--in Pennsylvania, and the soldiers would come over to Youngstown. That was their city to carouse in, I guess. So, there was a lot of that. The women, "Rosie the Riveter" came on the scene. Women became independent. They had a paycheck.

S: A big difference.

R: A big difference. You could not get in the stores in Youngstown on Sunday for the shoppers. After years of depression, they finally were making big bucks . . . at the Ravenna arsenal, at the steel mills. Everybody had a job.

S: So, you were able to see what it was like during the Depression. How would you describe this area during the Depression?

R: I suppose it was so normal. It wasn't poor like The Grapes of Wrath poor. We had many hoboes stop at our house, and there wasn't the fear. Everybody fed--folks fed the hoboes.

S: What would be a hobo?

R: A man who would come knocking at your door, "Missus, can you spare me a meal?"

S: Just somebody who--would they be traveling through the area, or would they be people out of work?

R: They'd hop off the trains.

S: Now a days, you'd be like, "There's somebody at my door. I'm going to call the police."

R: Right.

S: That would just be a common occurrence then?

R: Yes. You didn't invite them in, but you'd sit right here on either the front or the back porch. Whatever you had in the house, you shared with them.

S: That's really interesting. I think that's really neat.

R: Something interesting--my mother, like I said, my dad died. So my mother, to support her children, ran a boarding house. The men who worked in the mill would come for breakfast, and they would pick up their lunch buckets that my mom would have packed. Then, they would come for supper and drop off their lunch buckets. They boarded at our house. My mom decided on that. She said, "If I have to be buying food for the boarders, there will always be food for the children." That is really how . . . and the dishes . . . I was too young, but the older girls told me about washing those lunch buckets every night and getting them ready.

S: For the next day?

R: For the next day.

S: So, you ran a boarding house. Were they immigrant workers?

R: No. Most of them worked at A.M. Byers Steel.

S: They were single?

R: I suspect, but, you see, men would go where the jobs were.

S: And then, leave their families at home?

R: Because, when A.M. Byers moved to Ambridge, Pennsylvania, many of the local men went, and they only came home on weekends. They probably did the same thing that the boarders once did at our house.

S: Just traveled from place to place.

R: Where the jobs were.

S: That was during the Depression when things were real tight, though. If you had a job, you kept it where ever you had to go.

R: Oh, yes, yes.

S: Then, after the Depression and during the war, there was more money?

R: Yes.

S: How was it living at that time? How was it living during the war, because there was rationing and everything?

R: You could always get gas stamps on the black market. We had dealt with one store for so many years, that the man, the butcher there, always had our portion of meat. When his meat order came in, his old customers, he made sure they had their couple pounds of whatever came in.

S: He always was taking care of his older customers.

R: Right. Maybe not in the quantity that you once had. [It was] the same way with soap.

S: Soap was hard to get?

R: Soap was hard to get. We always had our . . . because we had dealt with that one store for so long, and many families did at that time. You had you corner butcher store, that you just went to time and again.

S: And he'd help you out with everything?

R: Yes.

S: Like you said with the hoboes and everything, people were much closer. People were much more friendlier. Is that a good way to describe it?

R: I dislike saying that, because I think now people are great, in today's world. I suspect on this street, if anyone needed anything. . . .

S: They would help you.

R: Oh, yes.

S: I know. Even when we see people down at the university, myself, I know we're always willing to help people out. We do things for people.

R: Yes, I don't . . . maybe in big cities. . . .

S: In some parts of even any city, just use common sense.

R: Yes, now we lock our doors as opposed to not locking them. But, I think people are still friendly and great.

S: Yes. You met your husband when you were in high school?

R: Yes.

S: So you've known him since, what, freshman year in high school?

R: Yes.

S: What was he like? What kind of guy was he?

R: I don't think we got together until what, about junior year, Herb? (Herb answers, "Probably.")

S: So, you dated when you were juniors?

R: We dated when we were in high school. Then, he went to war and, I think--we weren't real good buddies. I think I wrote him, maybe two letters. Then, when he came back from the service, we got married. I mean, we just started dating again, and that was that. He has this beautiful story that he always, even in high school, was in love with me. I eat it up. [laughter]

S: The Niles football games were the big games?

R: Yes. [There were] snake dances through the city.

S: Through the whole city? You'd dance through the city?

R: Oh, yes.

S: They don't do anything like that now.

R: See, the street. . . ?

S: Yes. How much has this area changed? Physically, how much has Girard changed?

R: Well, downtown has disintegrated.

S: [It's] just the same, really, with Youngstown. The downtown area is not the same because of malls and things like that. There's not much need for downtown.

R: Right. You can't buy a spool of thread in Girard. You can't buy anything. What the drugstores handle, you can buy, and we have a candy shop. Downtown, I believe and I think that we don't have a downtown anymore. We have a couple of drugstores and a candy shop. You have your knitting shop. . . . What kind of stores do they call those? Specialty stores, I guess.

S: Yes. Do you think what caused the change from. . . like, what was it? Girard was, like, it's own independent city and Youngstown was it's own independent little city. But, as technology improves, everybody starts to get the same things. That's what makes the difference.

R: I think cars and transportation--it was more difficult to get into Youngstown, and costly. So, you would shop in Girard. It was a treat to go into Youngstown.

S: That was the big city?

R: Sure.

S: You would go to downtown Youngstown?

R: Downtown Youngstown.

S: Were there stores? What would you see in downtown Youngstown?

R: The windows of the stores were always decorated so nicely. We would just walk up and down Federal street and, "Oh, look at this pretty window and that." Of course, you would go in the stores.

S: There was just a lot more to do in the city.

R: Yes. Again, there were those cute little ice cream-candy stores. We'd stop for a soda. Beside every movie house there was and ice cream [shop].

S: So, going to the city itself was something that you would do only on special occasions? That's something you'd look forward to doing?

R: Oh, yes.

S: How would you get into the city itself?

R: Public transportation.

S: Like a trolley or a bus?

R: Yes. In fact, during the war, I think they tore up the railroad lines to use the steel, and I think that's when buses came into. . . .

S: We'll start talking about Idora Park now. What are your earliest memories of the park?

R: Planning ahead for probably weeks, because I remember going down [for the] Irish day picnic. Once a year they had Irish Day. I think my mother must have saved all year to go to Irish Day. We packed our baskets, and we walked far enough that you were eligible for a transfer out. We didn't have to pay two fares. We just ran from one end of that park to the next. In the picnic then, we had time to gather at the picnic area. There were swings and teeter-totters up on a hill. I remember the penny arcade. We spent hours at the penny arcade. Of course, as I got older, there was a swimming pool. I didn't realize until recently that it was a salt water . . . that was supposed to be the largest salt water pool in . . . I don't know.

S: In it's time?

R: In it's time, yes. They had salt water, and I didn't realize. I had forgotten that.

S: I wonder why they had salt water in the pool.

R: It was sandy. They had sand, not concrete. To pretend it was the ocean, I guess.

S: Was it a big pool? Real large?

R: Yes. In my mind's eye it was huge. It was much bigger than Girard's--that's something else we did. They put a swimming pool in Girard, and we went up to the Girard swimming pool all the time.

S: In the park?

R: In the park, sure, I had forgotten that.

S: Now, a question even with the Girard pool: did they have days where the blacks could swim and not the whites? Did they have any segregation like that?

R: If they did, I don't remember. We had very few colored folks in Girard. Very few.

S: I know, at Idora Park, they had days where the blacks could come in, and that was it. They could use the pool and stuff.

R: I didn't know that. See the segregation. . . ?

S: You said [about] Irish Day at Idora Park?

R: I think every nationality in the area had their day. It was Slovenian Day. It was German Day. It was Irish Day. My mom was the Irish one in the family. Crowds were her friends and their children, the Sullivan's and the Moran's.

S: Everybody would pile in and go down to Idora Park.

R: Don't you wonder how they kept the food safe?

S: Yeah.

R: Now, we have to have our coolers, and I know we did not [have them then].

S: Just pack the stuff up and throw stuff in a thermos and go down there. With the pool--like you said the pool was really big--did they have lifeguards and everything?

R: Yes.

S: Did they have hours for the pool? Was it just, you could swim all day if you wanted to, or you could only be in for a certain amount of time? Did they have certain hours that you could or couldn't use the pool?

R: I can't remember that, Scott.

S: Just go in and go swimming?

R: Just go in and go swimming.

S: You would just bring stuff to get changed into?

R: Yes. This would not be on Irish Day. On Irish Day, I don't think the pool was there when I was that young. We just used the rides. I remember, for some reason, going up the hill and having lunch. We played a long time up on the playground there, too. That sticks in my mind. And I remember, as we got older, then you'd use the pool, and then you would go to Heidelberg Garden for beers. Then, of course, comes dances. We used to stand in line to ride some of those. . . .

Every union had a picnic down there. I have an idea, if you have access to your calendar, I bet that park was booked. . . .

S: All the time.

R: All the time, because every union, you know. . . .

S: All the companies. . . .

R: All the companies . . . all the ethnic groups. . . . I was telling my friend that stopped this morning. She's the one who said, "Oh Kathryn, that was the salt water in there." His kids lived near there. They would go over, and they would just kind of mill in with the crowd. They'd get their tickets, you know, Local 377, or CIO, or whatever it was, and they said they rode all day. They would go over, and they would go in. So, I said everyone. . . . The park must have been booked quite heavily.

S: What do you remember in the penny arcade? What would you play in there? What kind of games?

R: They had the metal disks. . . .

S: With the star?

R: With the star.

S: I used to do that.

R: Did you, Scott? Oh, the shovels that you put your coins in, and the arms came out.

S: You'd get stuff. Did you ever get anything?

R: Not worth while.

S: I never won on one of those.

R: I am certain that we never got everything worth while. And didn't we test our. . . .

S: Your grip and stuff?

R: Yes, your grip. I remember that.

S: Did they have anything, like, little movies that you could watch in there? Where you'd put in, and basically, the little cards would flash?

R: That's right. They would go fast. They would flip down and look like a movie.

S: What kind of shows . . . what kind of little cards did they have in there?

R: Mostly slapstick. Those were the ones I watched. Would it be Harold Lloyd? Maybe a western; but as I remember, I used to laugh, so I suspect it was kind of a slapstick.

S: Can you remember if they had anything else, like a shooting gallery in there or anything like that?

R: If they did, it probably didn't interest me. I remember you would get a penny's worth of--did they call them Boston Baked Beans?

S: Yes, Boston Baked Beans.

R: And you would get a penny's worth of various. . . . The penny arcade and me got along fine.

S: That was always . . . was it in that white building at the time?

R: It was a big building. If I'm not mistaken, there was even a little porch out front.

S: Okay. That was always one of my favorite places. I'd go in there, and I liked to play the older stuff, though. I'd do the arm with the crane, and I'd make myself one of those little round things with the stars. You could stamp your name in it.

R: You'd get almost all finished, and you'd make a mistake. And you'd get so aggravated. You'd have to start all over again.

S: Were there any other games there, like the goldfish thing that used to go around?

R: Oh, the ponds? Yes, they had all sorts of those things. We used to fish in the fish pond, sure.

S: Was that one of the big games?

R: It was exciting. "What are we going to get?"

S: What's the one game called? Skeet Ball, where you roll the ball up. Did they have that kind of stuff? Bingo and stuff like that?

R: Yes. Bingo I don't remember.

S: That was pretty boring, anyway.

R: But, I remember throwing, much like the carnivals now with. . . .

S: Did you throw the hoops onto the pop bottles?

R: Sure.

S: How about throwing the ball and knocking down milk bottles and stuff like that?

R: Sure.

S: Did they have any . . . I know at one time they had monkeys and birds and stuff in the park. Did they have those in the park?

R: Yes, we used to. . . . They would have them--as I remember--they would have some here in a cage quite tall; and then yards away, they would have monkeys. We would feed them.

S: What would you feed them, like popcorn or bread?

R: Peanuts.

S: Did the monkeys ever come up to you, or were they down in a hole?

R: I don't remember. It seems to me they took peanuts out of our hand, but I could be wrong.

S: Was that pretty neat, the birds and the monkeys and everything?

R: Sure. It was our Disney World. You could go up into Cleveland, but not until you got much older. If you had a fancy date to take you up to Cleveland to use the beach, that was. . . .

S: I'm going to turn the tape over now.

BEGIN SIDE TWO OF TAPE

R: They were much more thrifty. They'd do good in this day and age, the EPA. They didn't waste things. Do you know anyone that saves string now?

S: No. I work to keep my cans and bottles to recycle.

R: Do they use string now? They don't even use it.

S: Yeah.

R: You didn't throw a piece of string out [back then]. You sewed it together for a kite string It was different. They did save. I know my mother threw all of her garbage out on the garden patch and dug it under a couple times a year, composting it. It was basic.

S: Keeping the stuff going.

R: In that ground, she just grew all kinds of things.

S: With the park then, you would go out on, like Irish Day, an ethnic day, or a company day?

R: Right.

S: And, that was up until when you started getting into high school. When you started getting into high school, did you go more often?

R: Well, I suppose, then . . . I think they even had one of our school dances down there, like junior or senior. Then, it almost had to be dates, a date place to go, not so much the family picnics. I know, [we were] kidding about Heidelberg Gardens.¹ We'd go down to Heidelberg Gardens. They even gave dance lessons. My girlfriends and myself, we'd catch those two buses--I think by then it was buses--and we'd go down and have a few beers. Can you imagine the young girls now, doing that?

S: No.

R: But, we did. I think then it was, when we had a big date, that we'd go and see the big bands. At intermission we'd go out and ride the

S: Ride the rides and everything?

R: The rides, yes.

S: What bands do you remember?

R: I remember Frankie Carl. I remember Kay Kaiser. Specifically, I don't remember any others. You weren't fortunate enough to get a date to go to all of them. I didn't go without . . . but, there you stood. You didn't do all that much dancing as standing and watching. That's when the three would get up and sing their little songs and back down.

S: Was that a big social event, to go out to Idora Park? Was that something you looked forward to doing?

R: You were pretty fortunate when you had a date to go hear one of the big bands.

S: How often do you think you'd go out there? Like once or twice a month or once a week even?

R: No, no, no. If you got there once a month every other month. . . .

S: Really?

R: During the teen years. Yes. By 20, except for a big band, we didn't go.

S: You didn't really want to go to ride rides or anything?

R: No.

S: You just went to go see the bands. So basically, when you were young, it was the fun place to go. . . .

R: Right.

S: You'd ride all the rides and everything and go swimming.

R: When our children were small, we started going back again. We took them several times.

S: I know when I talk with people a lot of times, one thing almost everybody mentions is the French fries.

R: Vinegar.

S: Yeah, they were the best French fries in the world, though. Do you remember anything food-wise. Did they have any restaurants there or things like that?

R: Heidelberg Gardens sold food.

S: What kind of food? Hot dogs and stuff?

R: Sandwiches, the sausage, not dinners, but lots of good tavern type foods. All up and down the midway, there were again, the carnival type--I don't think they had sausage and peppers like they have at Canfield. I remember cotton candy. I was impressed even watching them make that, as a child. But later on, I don't remember it big on food.

- S: Just the rides or even like popcorn or something like that that you might get, or candy apples or something.
- R: Right.
- S: So, it was basically just a fun place to go as a little kid, then when you got older, it became more of a social event to go to the park.
- R: Yes.
- S: Did you ever go out there besides for the bands? Did you ever go out there to meet people, or to meet friends out there, or anything like that?
- R: When we were younger, in our teens--like I said, when we would go to Heidelberg Garden, you knew darn well we were looking, you know, for anybody we knew or anybody who'd be fun to get to know.
- S: Did you go out there at all after you were married, I mean, before you had kids, to still see the big bands or anything?
- R: Yes, I remember we belonged to a club. There were about four or five couples, and we all went out. But, I think they had brought a special band in that night, or maybe it was the regular Saturday night dances. The group of us went out, and it brought back a lot of real good memories.
- S: All the memories and everything?
- R: All twisting around with the lights.
- S: So you still really kept in contact with the park then after . . . a lot of people, after 18 or 19 quit going?
- R: No. I think we. . . . Like I said, I remember well going down with four or five couples--that was since Herb and I were married--and walking in thinking, "Boy, this brings back a lot of memories."
- S: When you brought your kids to the park, your children, how was that? Was it kind of neat to bring your children to the park and see how they experienced the park?
- R: Sure it was, except, you know about mothers being nervous, I don't think I relaxed once. But, what I don't remember growing up was where they had the children's area. When we brought our children--they may have had it. . . .
- S: I think that's something they put in after a while.

- R: Later? Yes, because I remember I thought, "Well, thank goodness." I remember once people from Canada came down and we took them to Idora Park. They were all going to go on the Wild Cat, the children and the dads. I wasn't going to go. Well, it turned out the other two dads didn't go and Herb got stuck on the Wild Cat with all the kids.
- S: What did they think of the park? Were they pretty impressed with it?
- R: Yes, they were.
- S: It's very unusual for a city as small as Youngstown to have a park like Idora Park. That's what made the park interesting.
- R: Yes. They thought it was a great place. They brought their children with them.
- S: What were your children's reactions to the park? What did they see? What did they like to do? Did you bring them to the park, like, once a summer? What did they do? Did they go on the rides?
- R: Yes. They did all the children's things. I'm sure they spent time on the rides. They ate park food, the goodies. I don't even know if they had a penny arcade by then. I don't remember that. But, we took them down a couple times a year probably. Or, when folks came, that was a place to take them.
- S: Was it still, even at that time, for the kids, a big social event? Was it a big fun thing to do that they could really look forward to?
- R: I think so. There again, growing up--when our children were growing up, we didn't have a lot of money. Herb drove a truck. We didn't go on fancy--our kids probably didn't get to Cedar Point. I'll bet you our youngest was 12 or 13 years old [by the time we went to Cedar Point]. When they were kids--well, we went to Canada to camp. But Cedar Point, that was. . . .
- S: That was a big deal. I've only been there once.
- R: We used to take the children about every--I guess once a year, we took them up.
- S: Were there any other times that you'd go to Idora Park, besides with your children? After you were married and had kids, did you go to any of those shows, the flower shows or things like that?
- R: Yes.

S: What were those like? Like craft shows, flower shows, home shows?

R: Just an elaborate craft show. [It was] a miniature Canfield Fair where they had all their. . . .

S: They just had displays up and things. Could you buy thing at those?

R: No. I guess they were just like for storm windows or aluminum siding and landscaping. If you were interested, I don't think they--of course they don't sell aluminum siding. They wanted you to see their wares.

S: What they had on display. With Idora Park, do you think the city lost a lot when they closed the park?

R: Well, I think they did, because I know now that there is Disney World and there is Cedar Point. But, to take a family to Cedar Point today, it would cost a couple hundred dollars minimum.

S: Minimum.

R: To go to Sea World, it would cost. If something like Idora Park was there, maybe some of the children that weren't as privileged as others. . . .

S: Could use it.

R: Could use it. They have to travel so far now, and it's so costly. I wouldn't be surprised if, especially the way the pendulum is swinging, trying to save gas and. . . . I think it's swinging back toward--you don't need all that. And, who can afford Disney World any more?

S: Yeah, your talking hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of dollars if you want to go and spend the night and everything else. . . .

R: About a thousand, with a family from this area.

S: Yeah. It would be about a thousand dollars. That's where I want to go on my honeymoon.

R: Is it?

S: Yeah. I want to go there for three days. They have where you go for three days, then you can go on a cruise for three days.

R: Yes.

S: I figured that would be a good thing to do. I've never been there. I've never gone on a vacation in my life. I want to go to Disney World. It is a lot different now.

R: Yes. Of course, I know that there is a bigger gap now between the "haves" and the "have nots." Maybe, the "have nots" couldn't even afford Idora, a park like Idora. It seems pitiful that they don't have anything. I don't mean just the welfare, I mean middle class folks now. It's hard for them.

S: That's the group that doesn't seem to get any breaks.

R: Right.

S: It seems like the upper class gets breaks and the lower class gets breaks, but the middle class tows the hard road.

R: That's right. I don't know if there'd be a market for it or not, but I think the children are being deprived because it's not there.

S: They play video games. They don't read books anymore. They watch T.V. They don't go outside and play baseball or play catch or anything, they play Nintendo. I think it's a lot different.

R: Can you imagine, now trying to play kick the can?

S: Somebody would call the police in 10 seconds.

R: Sure. The kids would be hit with a car.

S: How important do you think, growing up, Idora Park was to you? Do you think it played any kind of role when you were growing up?

R: Well, it gives me a lot of good memories. When you hit 70, you don't do anymore, but you kind of think back on what you've had. Sure, now that you mentioned it, I don't sit her and say, "Oh, remember that good time at Idora," but remembering going down to those picnics was. . . . For a treat, we used to save Wonder Bread wrappers, and with Wonder Bread wrappers and three cents, oh, I remember. There's a lot of good memories from there. If it hadn't been for Idora, we would never have ridden on a merry-go-round.

S: That's true. Roller coasters and stuff?

R: No. We never would have. And you wonder now are there children growing up in our area who have never been on a merry-go-round.

S: [Who have] never been on a roller coaster, none of that. I've been to Cedar Point once, and I might not even have gone to Cedar Point. But, I've been on the Wild Cat and The Jack Rabbit and the Lost River and everything else. I remember my two sisters and my brother and I, we used to get up, pack something to eat, and we'd walk down. We'd walk from the South Side down to Cedar Point. It would take us about an hour to walk there and we'd go and we'd spend the day. It was such a big deal.

R: Sure.

S: It was so much fun. Now we don't have that. That's true. I didn't really think of that. Kids will never have ridden on a roller coaster. Grow up, live your whole life and never ride a roller coaster. It's kind of . . . I guess somebody bought the plans to the Wild Cat and the Jack Rabbit. So, I guess they've been rebuilt some place else.

R: Reconstruct them.

S: Somebody bought . . . the merry-go-round's in a warehouse in New York City. It's sitting in a warehouse which is sad.

R: Yes. Isn't it?

S: The merry-go-round sitting in a warehouse. I remember the pigs and stuff that used to suck up paper. They used to be my favorite things. I used to like that, too.

R: Yeah.

S: If you had one word to describe Idora Park, what would it be? What do you think would be a good word?

R: Well. . . .

S: How about several words? [Laughter] That's better.

R: It was great! It really was great. It provided a lot of fine entertainment, a lot of good memories. It was special to children.

S: Do you think, also though, even with the bands and everything that played, [that] it played an important role in the city? [Do you think] that [when] they brought in the bands and it was such a, for the eighteen and over at least, it was such a social meeting place.

R: It was, and I cannot help but believe that it brought some economy. I think it brought some money into the city, because when the companies would have their picnics, they would buy presents, and this. . . . I mean, there was a domino effect there. The buses would be busier. I think it was an asset. I'm not sure who would be brave enough to invest their money in. . . .

S: In something like that today.

R: . . . in an experiment like that today. It would have to be a golden arches.

S: Yeah. McDonald's could do it. That's the only person that would have enough money. McDonald's could do it. Do you have anything else to say before we finish up? Any other things you'd like to talk about with the park, or anything?

R: No, not really.

S: Okay. You did mention something though about a roller skating rink in there.

R: I feel certain. I feel certain.

S: That they had a roller skating rink? That they could just put down and then pick up or was it a permanent one?

R: No. I think we skated on the hard wood dance floor.

S: On the dance floor? Oh, probably. Was roller skating pretty popular?

R: Oh, yes. Before the war, it was very popular. Well, I know three for certain. At the corner of--what was it?--Rayenwood, there was a building, the Eagle's building at the corner of Rayenwood that's falling down now. The second floor there.

S: They had it on the second floor?

R: On the second floor was a roller . . . go down to Eagle's Skating and Howland Springs. That would be on just this side of Eastwood Mall, on the east side of the Eastwood Mall, and at Avon Oaks. So, there was one in Youngstown, Girard, and Niles that I know of. And I'm certain there was one at Idora. So, it had to be [popular]. And look at the one in Cortland, there's one in Cortland. Yes, roller skating was quite. . . .

S: Popular.

R: My shoe skates I had were my pride and joy.

S: Okay, thank you very much, it's been a very good interview.

R: That was interesting, Scott.

END OF INTERVIEW