

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Idora Park Project

Employment at Idora

O. H. 805

JOSEPH KEARNEY

Interviewed

by

Robert Toti

on

December 19, 1986

## JOSEPH KEARNEY

Joseph L. Kearney was born on September 23, 1920, the son of Joseph and Rose Kearney in Youngstown, Ohio. At the age of sixteen he began working in the ballroom of Idora Park during the summer of 1936. He continued to work for Idora until 1940 when he began working for G. F. Business. In 1942, he spent three and a half years in the military service and in 1945 he returned to G. F. Business. He continued this occupation until he retired in 1982.

Mr. Kearney returned to Idora Park during 1950 and was involved with all types of park maintenance for the next thirty-four years. He did welding, roofing, painting, and many other odd jobs during his numerous years at Idora. Mr. Kearney retired from Idora Park when the park was closed in 1985. Mr. Kearney and his wife have three children: Patricia, Margaret, and Joseph.

Robert Toti

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSPEH KEARNEY

INTERVIEWER: Robert Toti

SUBJECT: dance hall, park plan dancing, dress code, maintenance duties, swimming pool, fire

DATE: December 19, 1986

T: This is an interview with Joe Kearney for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Rob Toti, at 2402 San Pedro Drive, on December 19, 1986, at 2:00 p.m.

First of all, could you please tell me a little bit about your childhood, when you were born, your brothers, sisters?

K: I was born on the east side on Lansing Avenue and we moved onto Boston Avenue in 1929. I went to St. Dominic's School. Then I went to Ursuline. When I was in school, in 1936 I went to work at Idora Park. I worked there until 1940 when I hired out to General Fireproofing. In 1942 I went into the service. Upon discharge I went back to work at the Fireproofing and in 1950 I went back to working part-time at Idora Park.

T: What was your first experience with Idora Park? Did you ever go there as a young child?

K: Yes, sure. When we lived on Boston Avenue, we used to walk out to the park pretty often. I guess like every kid I thought that maybe I would like to work there some day.

T: Did you ever go out for the 3¢ days?

K: Oh yes. We used to go out there at 5:00 in the morning. The Vindicator used to have tickets that would be good for prizes, roller skates, fountain pens, footballs, basketballs, baseball gloves. They used to have the drawing on the roof of the old theater across from the main office. It was always crowded so we never used to ride on those days. We would go up when it wasn't so busy.

But they used to pack the park. Isaly's had a 3¢ day, the Vindicator, the Telegram, Wonder Bread, Sanitary Milk Company. Grocers had a big picnic: Free hot dogs, free ice cream, free milk for the kids.

T: This was during your youth. How old were you during these years would you say?

K: Twelve, thirteen, fourteen. I was sixteen when I started out there.

T: What made you decide to become an Idora Park employee?

K: I basically did it for money. I wanted to make a little money so I got a job in the dance hall. Of course, it didn't pay much money. I think it was 75¢ a night. That was in 1936. In 1937 I went to \$1 an hour. That was the year of the steel strike.

T: Could you describe what your job was like working in the ballroom?

K: At first all we used to do was herd the people off the floor when I first started. That was with park plan dancing. After every dance you cleared the floor and then they came back on the floor and deposited another ticket. It was quite an experience. It was a lot of fun. You met a lot of people.

I stayed there for five years. I worked the front gate and cashier. At the end I was cashier when I quit and went to work at Fireproofing because their schedule at Fireproofing was such that the only times I could work at the park was on weekends, so I just worked part-time. Of course, that summer of 1940, why, Fireproofing was picking up and I was going on third turn. I couldn't work anything out in the schedule so I didn't work at the park the rest of the year. I quit about midseason in 1940.

T: Was there a dress code that was enforced when you were working out at the park the first time?

K: Absolutely.

T: Can you explain that?

K: You had to have a shirt, tie, and a coat on. If you didn't have a shirt and tie and a coat, you couldn't get in, period. All the help, your ticket takers, all had to wear white suits and they either wore a blue tie or a maroon tie and they had boutonnières to match. That was their dress. You absolutely couldn't get in without a tie. They used to rent ties over at the office to loan to them. You probably put up a deposit and they used to give them extra jackets too.

Sometimes you would see some weird ones. A guy 6'6" tall came over with a sleeve halfway up the forearm just to get into the dance because he either wanted to meet somebody or listen to the band. It wasn't until after the war where they relaxed the dress code.

T: During the years that you weren't at the park, did you keep the contact with the park and its employees?

K: Oh, sure. A lot of them I knew from the time I worked there. That was when I decided that I needed to make a little extra money. In 1950 I talked to Bob Mills. He was the ride superintendent at that time. He said, "Come on out." That was when they were building the Kiddie Land so they needed help. From 1950 until the fire I stayed there. I didn't work steady; I worked part-time, but I put in a lot of hours.

T: Did you ever switch back to full-time at the park?

K: No. I intended to when I retired. I retired in 1982 from Fireproofing after forty-two years. I thought I would have something to fall back on to keep me busy. Then the fire and that was the end of that. So now I just loaf.

T: You said that you started up again in 1950 when Kiddie Land was being built.

K: Right.

T: Do you know anything about the background of Kiddie Land, how it came about, what was there beforehand?

K: I do. It was built on the spot where the swimming pool was. They filled in the pool and built the Kiddie Land. Probably in the long run, Kiddie Land was more successful than the swimming pool ever was. Of course, a lot of people would argue that point. Financially it was better. You always had a nice Kiddie Land.

T: Do you have any idea why they might have closed the pool down?

K: I don't have any idea exactly. There are probably several theories on why. For sure I couldn't tell you. Financially it was an expensive proposition for a big pool like that because there was a mammoth filter working all the time. It probably was getting pretty expensive and money wasn't that great around so you couldn't jack the . . .

T: The fee?

K: The fee, you couldn't make the fee too high because children didn't have it. If you were working for 25¢ or 30¢ an hour, you couldn't afford to pay 50¢ to go swimming.

T: Do you think that the racial problems had anything to do with it?

K: I don't know actually whether they had anything to do with it or not, but probably fear of something happening had something to do with it. We had never had any trouble before. We had a few smarties who tried to cause trouble, but most of them were pretty good.

T: Were you involved in the building of Kiddie Land at all?

K: Well, we all were involved because we all worked. That was an old pool and it was hard. When they filled that dirt in, there was no way for that water to get through that cement and they had to try to break additional holes in the cement. The water was just laying there. The dirt was acting as a dam and the water was building up. We were running around there with pumps and shovels, pumping the water out trying to get rid of it so they could get down to break the cement. They covered it over with blacktop and started putting in the rides. For a couple of years there it was real spongy. You could feel it as you walked. It felt like walking on carpet.

After they closed the pool for swimming, they tried a couple different enterprises. They had little motorboats; they tried them. They didn't work out too good. During the picnic days when the pool was open they used to have water ride boats. They would take them over there for Sons of Italy picnics or something like that and they would put these boats in the water. Employees would pull the boats around like a gondolier and they would have Italian singers singing in the boat.

T: What types of jobs did you do working in maintenance?

K: We would repair rides. Any breakdown, we went out. We had a maintenance gang about . . . It all depended on how many were there. I only worked part-time. There were a couple of other part-timers. If a ride broke down, we went out there and fixed it and we stayed there until it was running again. We used to relieve the operators on the rides, tend bar, anything at all. Anything they asked you to do, you did it.

T: Did you do painting?

K: I painted; I welded, dug ditches.

T: Roofing?

K: Roofing, laid railroad ties, changed railroad ties. When a train would get derailed, we would put it back on the track.

T: Could you explain that in a little bit of detail?

K: The kids would walk around and they would put big rocks on the

track. At night sometimes the operator couldn't see the rocks and he would hit the rocks. It would throw the wheel off. Then you would have to get a couple of jacks, big timbers, a lot of manpower, and go over and lift them up and put them back on the track.

T: Did anybody ever get hurt?

K: Not by being derailed. They would knock the ties loose, run them out of line. I don't ever recall anybody getting hurt from a derailment. Of course, it was always a possibility. Fortunately, I don't think anybody did.

T: What types of painting did you do? Do you remember what exactly you painted?

K: Just rough painting, buildings, rides, cars--some of the different cars they had on them. I used to work down in the shop in the wintertime painting cars, doing almost anything. Mainly I was a welder, not the welder who started the fire. That was a funny thing. I was going to go out there that day too. Somebody called me about 9:00 and I was on my way out to the park. Something turned up. I decided that I would go later or go the next day. That was the day that . . .

T: There was no tomorrow.

K: There was no tomorrow.

T: What type of welding did you do? Did you weld in the Lost River?

K: Oh yes, I did a lot of welding down there.

T: Can you explain what that was like, what the conditions were like?

K: When it was full of water, you couldn't work. Most of the holes would be patched in the wintertime. It was cold down there, damn cold on that steel floor. That was after you put in eight hours of work on your regular job. You would go out there for four, five, or six hours and freeze. I think around 1951 they put the all new steel tank in there. It was probably around 1956, 1957 when we started doing the patchwork and it kept up until it burned down.

We worked down at the dance hall. We helped remodel the dance hall. My wife's uncle, Nick Johnson, and I did some of the iron-work. We put the eyebeams, the channel irons all around the dance hall so that when the construction crew came in there, they laid the big trestles up there. That was all done in the wintertime and that was cold up on those scaffolds. I forget exactly what year it was. It was 1953 or 1954 when they remodeled the ball-room, but they still had the same floor that they skated on when they had the skating rink in there.

I worked the skating rink too. I think they built it in the fall of 1937. It opened in probably 1938. I worked at the skating rink there for two years. I worked in the checkroom. Whenever we weren't working, we always would go out and skate. It was the same thing, no money.

- T: Could you explain the process of converting the dance floor into a skating rink and how that was done?
- K: They laid building paper all over the floor and then they put a framework of framing timbers all the way across and made those squares out of it, those little rectangles. They filled them with sawdust and then they put another layer of building paper on and then they put the maple flooring down. That was in 1938 and the floor is still there. That was a big, beautiful skating rink. There were no posts inside, nothing. You just would skate.

They had the bandstand down at the far end. The bandstand had been moved I don't know how many times. When I first went to the park, it was near the middle by the side door. Then they moved it down to the other end and they left it like that for when they had the skating rink. Then they built a skating rink outside by the Kiddie Land, Terrazzo floor.

There were a lot of changes they did, a lot of changes. You could make a list for an hour long, different things that they changed around, moved the Monkey Island, moved the little kiddie coaster. That was moved twice that I know of while I was there and they moved the Monkey Island. That was when they built the bumper cars. They had a smaller version of Monkey Island and moved it over by the Kiddie Land. Then they tore it down. The monkeys kept getting out. They were afraid they were going to cause some trouble so they just did away with it.

- T: Were you ever working when the monkeys got out?

K: Oh yes.

T: What was that like?

K: Well, they didn't all get out. A few of them got out.

T: You mentioned some of the changes. Could you discuss the changes about the goldfish pond or the duck pin bowling alley a little bit?

K: They filled the goldfish pond in when the trolleys quit running, when they did away with the trolleys, streetcars. When they did away with them, then they filled in the goldfish pond. The unloading shed, that was where they built the duck pin bowling alley. In later years they put the turtle ride . . . I think it was 1954 when they set up the turtle ride over where the



goldfish pond had been. In back of the turtle ride they had a miniature golf course built.

In the meantime they eliminated the pony track which was down in the same area; they eliminated that. They moved that up on the midway up on the north end of the park. It didn't do too well so they eliminated that altogether. It was a bother. They would have to run the ponies over to the ball park every night and turn them loose. Kids would be climbing over the fences chasing ponies.

At one time they had a beautiful ball field out there too. Two different teams played ball out there. Back in the 1930's, early 1930's, there was a ball club there. Then just before the war St. Louis Browns had a team there. Floyd Baker played there. It was a beautiful field. Those foul lines were 325 down the line. Some of the majors aren't that big and they had an old-fashioned grandstand, but it was nice. There were a lot of good ball games over there. I sold tickets over there for ball games. I think every kid who lived near the park chased foul balls. They would get a couple of foul balls and they would leave the ball game--good times.

T: Did you ever get to play in any of the pickup games they used to have over at the ball field?

K: Yes. Well, not in the later years but earlier in the earlier ones. We used to play the bands. We would maybe play for a keg of beer, Tiny Hill and Ray Carl, different bands. Then the winner drank for free. The losers bought the keg of beer. We used to have a lot of fun over there. At that time those bands used to come in for a week at a time. They weren't one-nighters like they are today. Most of them are all one-nighters. They would come in for a week and some of them stayed two weeks. Years before that I guess they had a couple of bands that played almost the whole summer. You had Ace Brigode. When those bands would stay for a week or two, then we would get up a ball game.

They used to board. These people around here had those big homes. They would have a couple of boarders. They would have two band members, three and then they would be close to the park.

All of that changed when they did away with the park plan. Of course, that was good times with the park plan.

T: You mentioned quite a number of jobs that you had. Are there any other jobs that we haven't mentioned?

K: I don't know of any I didn't do. The only two jobs that I know of that I never did were running the coaster rides. Years ago they had their own crews that ran the ride. They did all of their own rebuilding, ninety percent of it. They took care of their own. Then later on I don't know whatever happened

but they got away from that. They didn't have their own crews. That was probably back in the mid-1970's when it was the last time they had a regular crew that did their own work. Then toward the end they were hiring carpenters from the carpenter's union. It got to be quite an expense. The attendance was going down. There was no way for expansion. Real estate was so high then. The only way you could expand was to use up your parking and you had to have the parking. If you had the picnics, you had to have the parking.

But they used to pack them in there on those picnics, some big ones. They would come in there early in the morning. It would be 10:00, 11:00 at night before they loaded up to go home. They used to come in on the trains. Look what happened to the trains. They all went downhill. They used to have a big, old flatbed out there. We used to go down to the Erie station or down to the Pennsylvania station. All of those picnickers would come in on their excursions, load all of their baskets and that up on the truck, give them their check tickets, and take them on out to the park and put them in the checking room. Then when they wanted them for dinner, they would come and get the baskets.

You don't see any picnics like that anymore or any trains. Where would they go? You would have to go to Cleveland to get them off the train probably. We would ride the truck down and back holding baskets trying to make sure that none of them got damaged. That was quite a time. You would go early in the morning like on Saturday if there wasn't anything to do, nine times out of ten I would get stuck in the checkroom. They would bring in big sacks of peanuts. We had fresh roasted peanuts. People would come and we would give them all they wanted. If they had a pot, we filled the pot full of peanuts, everything. They had big picnics.

T: Where was the room located?

K: We had three different places. They had one checkroom in the Heidelberg; they had one over at the end of the Kiddie Land building--that was one of the bigger ones--and they had one in the bandstand, which turned out to be the centerpiece for the train, that octagon shaped bandstand.

T: The boarding . . .

K: Yes, the centerpiece. Two wings were built on after. That bandstand was moved out of there I don't know how many times. Further up on the hill where they had the bands, that was where they had the checkroom. Then when they got the train, they moved it down on the platform and that is where they made the train station.

T: Where was your home base, the headquarters for maintenance work?

K: Our shop was underneath the Heidelberg. I think the second year I was there they put a foundation under the Heidelberg. Before it was only a dirt floor and there was one, small area where the cooler was for the beer. The rest of it you couldn't walk. There wasn't even a crawl space up to the front. They jacked the building up, put new walls in it, new floor, and that is where the maintenance shop went, down in the basement.

Originally, it was in the storeroom behind the Heidelberg. If you wanted to cut wood, you had to open the door, stick it out the platform. If you went to rip a twelve or fourteen foot piece of lumber, you had to open the door because it wouldn't fit. So then after they moved downstairs, when they put a cellar under the Heidelberg, then we had all kinds of room. Knock on wood, we never had any problems. I welded there for years. I never started any fires or anything that would amount to anything.

The Heidelberg got so that the restaurant business fell off. It deteriorated. People weren't drinking beer and stuff like they used to. They used to have those nationality picnics and that. Boy, they would drink beer. Some days you would run through twenty . . . I have heard guys say that they had runthrough thirty kegs of beer in a day. That's a lot of beer.

Everybody had transportation. They didn't want to see Idora Park anymore; they wanted to go somewhere else. Now they don't think anything about getting in the car and driving. Whereas before, you had to depend upon mass transportation. When you had children, that was an ordeal.

When we were tearing that dance hall apart when we started to remodel it, it had this big, old drop ceiling made of canvas--dirty. Everybody who came out of there looked like they worked in the coal mines, all that dust. Then they changed everything around when they redid it. There were two balconies on each side of the ballroom facing the bandstand. They were graduated like three levels. Then at the far end of the ballroom you had another big hanging balcony that covered almost the entire width of the floor. Sometimes you would pack people in there. I was never there when they had the walk-a-thon and stuff like that out there. That was a little before my time.

In the wintertime they would put up the big, old, rough sides on the side of the building and cover it with tar paper and put some gas heaters in there. Then they would hold their dances. It wasn't until they built the skating rink that they put those big hanging heaters in there.

T: Were there any jobs that you did not especially care for as far as the numerous jobs that you did?

K: A lot of jobs nobody wanted to do.

T: Such as?

K: Plumbing repairs, I never did care for that kind of work. Some guys it doesn't bother, but I never liked the idea. There were some hard jobs. You didn't think about it. You just went and did it. I used to hate to . . . Whenever they would ask me to push a car on a hill, I would say, "You go. I ain't going." I almost fell out one day and I made sure I wasn't going up again.

T: Could you describe what it was like pushing one of the cars down the hill?

K: Actually there is nothing to it. It is just that either the wheels are frozen or sometimes when you pack them too full of grease they will slow down. If they are doing any construction work, they might get a little too tight, the radius, the width of the track. It might get a little too narrow and then it binds on the safety wheels, on the friction wheels. Then you would have to push until you get it. Whether it is that or the wheels, you don't know. We always had some tricky ones out there.

When you first start out, the track is all rusty. You can't go around there and steel wool, steel brush the whole track. So you ride it around and sometimes the rust will slow it down enough to stop. Once you get it going again, maybe the next time it won't stick. I rode that thing around thirty times in a row, just to knock the rust off the track. When you come off of there, your eyes are full of rust, your hair, your clothes, just from flying around there. Thirty times through there, they will run you just to knock the rust off.

T: Were there many times when you had to push the cars when there were actually people up on top?

K: Most of the time if anything happened when there were people on it, there would be a power failure. If it was just a matter of a fuse or something like that, it didn't take too long and then there were no problems. But if something happened where you had to take the people out of the car and walk them back down, it all depended upon where they were. Some people would be scared when they went up, especially when they had to get back out. It was the walk back down. I was never much for that high stuff. I was too heavy for that stuff.

T: How did the people get up to the top? Was there a special ladder?

K: Oh no, they had a walkway around there. The crew that is ordinarily on the coaster, they walk that track every morning; they checked that track every morning when it was running. Without fail everyday they went up and walked that track and

they checked for loose nuts, track bolts; they checked for damaged wood, rotten wood. Everyday they walked that and then they ran the car around empty before they ever put anybody in it. That was an everyday occurrence. You could hear those guys . . . Some of the older guys who worked there before and knew better, you would hear them out there pinging away early in the morning. At 8:00 they were on that track walking. They checked the track for loose bolts.

I never was afraid to ride any of them. Nobody ever got hurt just riding that ride. If they were fooling around, then they had a chance of getting hurt.

T: Didn't someone stand up on the Wildcat or the Jack Rabbit?

K: The Jack Rabbit.

T: I think someone died on the Jack Rabbit, right?

K: Yes, threw him off. It was a kid from Pennsylvania, from New Castle.

T: Do you remember approximately what year that was?

K: I don't remember. It might have been right around 1970, somewhere around in there.

T: But it was the Jack Rabbit, right, not the Wildcat?

K: No. It was right out in right field, but he was standing up facing the back end of the car. He went over one of those short dips on the Jack Rabbit and it just flipped him right out.

T: But there were never any serious injuries on the Wildcat, were there?

K: There were a couple who got hurt, but it wasn't from that. A couple of them got hurt on the loading dock from the crowd pushing, trying to get on, wanting the back seat. They tried to push somebody out of the way and somebody fell and got hurt. I was never scared to ride any of the rides. The only one I didn't like was that loop one.

T: The Rocket Plane?

K: No, that was another one. The one that swings around.

T: The Paratrooper?

K: No, not that. The one that has the hanging swings that was down by the golf course. The swings went out. I forget what they called it.

T: I know what you mean.

K: Not me, I was scared of that thing. I wouldn't get on there for a lot of money.

T: Getting back to your maintenance work, was there any major construction work at the park that you were ever involved with?

K: It all depends upon what degree of involvement. Like I said, my wife's uncle and I, we put the ironwork around the ballroom. That was in the winter and it was colder than the devil. Then when they remodeled the rocket ride, they built in refreshment stands under that. I did the ironwork on that one. That was the only construction welding I did. Most of my work was all repairs.

T: And these jobs were done during the off-season?

K: Oh yes.

T: Would they call you out to do these types of jobs or did you have a specific duty to do during the off-season?

K: No, I used to work almost everyday. When I worked day turn, I worked at night out there.

T: During the winter months?

K: If I worked afternoon turn, I worked out there in the morning. I worked almost everyday. When I worked day turn at G. F., I worked nights at the park. Like I said, the biggest part of my work was all repair work. There was a lot of work that had to be rebuilt. Where it is worn, you rebuild it like some of the cars. We rebuilt the rockets, had them down in the shops, the cars themselves. Then they used to bring the Wildcat cars, the Turtle cars into the shop. They had a big line truck, lift truck. They would bring them on up in a sling. They put them on a heavy dolly and rolled them into the shop and we would work on them in the shop during the winter. It is a big building, a big shop.

T: Around how many people did you work with?

K: There were only about six or seven actually on maintenance. In the wintertime sometimes I would be there by myself. Nobody would be there, just me. I would work four and a half hours, walk down there, close everything, always made sure if I was welding that I would shut the welder off half an hour ahead of time to make sure there was no smoke in there. Some nights I would have help.

They had all kinds of tools down there. They had a drill press and they had saws and gas welders, grinders, drills.

- T: Getting back to the rides now, do you know if any special official had to inspect the rides to insure that they were operating properly?
- K: They had the insurance man come in there twice a year. They never told you when they were coming. Everyday when there was a picnic, most of the crew would be out there at 8:00 or 10:00, a couple of hours ahead of time to make sure that if anything had to be done, it would be done. We would go out there and there was the insurance man checking your rides. They would mark everything down, red tag this, red tag that. "You need this, you need that. You better get it done." They got to the point where they were getting nasty. If it wasn't done, you weren't opened. I don't think they ever refused with the officials at the park, but I think the park tried awful damn hard to make sure it was all in line, done.
- T: Were the rides ever closed due to the fact that they were unsafe?
- K: Not because they were unsafe. They would shut them down because something broke; then they would have to shut it down.
- T: But they were never shut down by these security people, insurance people?
- K: No. I don't ever remember anything being shut down for that.
- T: Were you ever told that a problem needed to be corrected by the security people?
- K: Oh sure. They would give them the list of what had to be done. So then my boss, who at the end was Mike Duffy. . . Before that there was Bill Horvath and Gabe Cene and Bob Mills and on back down the line. They would say, "Now, this had to be done." And we would do it. They marked everything down on the sheet. If there were four sheets . . . If one guy saw a chain on an entrance that was broken or didn't have a hook on it, he would mark it down. It was supposed to have a hook on it. They didn't miss a whole lot.
- T: Tiny things, everything.
- K: Some of it used to make you mad because what's the difference? The operator is going to be there and the ticket taker is going to stand right in the doorway. That is what Lenny is doing now, ride inspector.
- T: Yes, for the state.
- K: I guess they must need them. You read about quite a few people getting hurt.

T: Do you remember any times where a ride had to be closed for a long period of time due to the fact that it wasn't running properly?

K: The only one that I ever remember being shut down for any period of time was the coaster ride where we had to do some major building work, lumber. You had to get the carpenters first, not that it was dangerous. They never shut down because somebody got hurt on it.

T: What was your relation to the owners, Max Rindin, Pat Duffy, and Mr. Cavalier?

K: What do you mean?

T: How did they treat you? How did you feel about them? What do you remember about them?

K: They were all nice. I never had any problems with any of them. I knew Max really well. He was there in 1936 when I went there and old Mr. Duffy was there; I knew him. Of course, my father told me quite a bit about him because he worked out there. He knew the old man Duffy pretty well. And Tony Cavalier, I worked with him. He was a carpenter by trade and a contractor. He was pretty handy with the building department. We all worked on those jobs out there. I knew Lenny. Lenny started as a kid out there.

T: Just like Mickey I guess?

K: Mickey too, yes. Young Patty Duffy--not the one now; the one who just died who was the president--he started out there when he was only about nine years old selling grab bags or something like that. He and Ducky Manning were two of a kind, always up to something. I never had any trouble. I always liked all of them. Even Max, the last year when he came up from Florida, he would come around and stop and chat for ten, fifteen minutes all the time.

Mickey, I worked some jobs for Mickey and Mickey did some jobs for me. My wife worked for Mickey and my two daughters and my other sister worked for Mickey. There must be about fifteen in the family who worked at the park.

T: In your family?

K: My sister's kids, my older sister's kids, my younger sister's kids, all of mine. We lived on Boston Avenue. That was only about a fifteen minute walk.

T: Would you say at one time that the park was a family affair?

K: No, I don't think. There couldn't be any family.



- T: It seemed like there were a large number of families who worked a number of different jobs.
- K: Just like you if you were working at the college and you had a son who wanted to work with you, word of mouth.
- T: True.
- K: So that's how you do it. All industry works the same, like when I went to Fireproofing. That's the way it was in those days. The park . . . Now Mickey's brother didn't want anything to do with the park. Mickey didn't want anything to do with the park for a long time. He played in his band. He finally came back to the job and did a hell of a job too, a good job. Mickey's two kids worked there, his wife. Patty Duffy, his two sons worked there and his two girls worked there. Lenny Cavalier was the only one I think who . . . I don't know; I don't think any of Lenny's kids worked there. Of course, I lost track of his kids anyway. There might have been one or two of them who worked there; I don't know.

There are a lot of memories out at that place. They had the old shooting gallery there. Every time I turned around they were calling me to go to the shooting gallery. Those chains running in the water would rust and sometimes the link would break and then the sprocket pulled the rest of the chain up and piled it up and shut the gallery down. You would go down there and they were hollering, "Shooting gallery! Shooting gallery!" When they used the old bullets, regular bullets, that was the moneymaker. It was a good machine. You would go down there and piddle around. You were in the water. Finally, they even closed that up. They put some kind of a game there, dart game or something.

We started a fire there one night. They were remodeling the midway and they had big, flat overhangs. When it came to draining the roof, two downspouts were running almost level so the water wouldn't drain. They had a steel plate up on the roof. If everybody had their gun in their hand, then maybe they would hit somebody on the coaster.

I was down there with the burner burning two slots. The first thing you know was that there was fire everywhere, everywhere. I turned around and I hollered to the guy who was with me. I said, "Jack, get the fire extinguisher!" He jumped in the jeep and he went up to the shop to get the fire extinguisher.

Earlier I had seen a hose down by the office. The office was maybe 100 feet from the shooting gallery. I grabbed the hose and raced back up and was squirting the hell out of it. Jack came down with the fire extinguisher. He held the hose and I went down around to the back of the popcorn stand and crawled under it, shooting that fire extinguisher around. We finally

got it out and then we went and got the boss. He lived right across the street in a big, old house on Parkview. Bob Mills at that time was maintenance superintendent. We went and got him. He came over and said, "No fire now. All you can do is wet it down good." They just remodeled it. They put new timbers under the floor of the shooting gallery. All that pounding and everything shook all of that powder because in every casing there are a couple of grains of gunpowder that aren't fired and it falls on the floor. Over a period of eight, ten years that stuff loosened up and then the sparks hit that thing. We had it all covered with tin, the floor and everything. How the sparks got under there, we don't know. It scared the hell out of me.

T: What did it do?

K: It didn't even scorch the floorboards. We were just lucky. That office would have been gone a long time before that if that thing ever got out of hand.

T: What time period was this, would you say?

K: That would be right around 1960 I imagine, 1960, 1962.

T: Before you mentioned a little bit about your relationship with the managers. What was your relationship like with the other park employees? Did you ever have any picnics or get-togethers, things of that nature?

K: We used to always have picnics at the park. We used to have big doings when they closed the park. We used to have picnics over in the Kiddie Land pavilion there. The bad thing about that was that there were so many kids. Almost every Saturday we used to have something. Young kids always got into too much trouble. It's impossible even to specify. They didn't want any part of that.

We used to run bus excursions. We used to go up to Kennywood. That was back in 1938. We had buses going to these different parks. Then we would have a ball game out there. Maybe some day the next month, those park employees would come down by bus down to Idora and we would have a ball game here. I had a good time while I was there. I didn't make too much money, but I had a lot of fun.

T: When I interviewed Al, he showed me a picture that must have been about four or five feet long and it had all of the park employees and maybe five buses in the background all getting ready for an excursion like you just mentioned.

K: Yes. We used to do that, yes. Even later on when my daughter was working with my wife out there, they used to . . . Well, the park didn't have anything to do with it, but the park would

try to get them tickets at a discount to get a bus full and go to Cedar Point. I loved that. I went a couple of times on a bus. You went back there with no trouble.

T: Just sit back.

K: Sit back and relax. At 10:00 at night the bus driver would load them all back up and bring them back to the park. We would have all of our cars parked at the park where they were watching them. You jumped in your car and in fifteen minutes you were home in bed, great time.

T: Could you compare Idora Park of the 1940's and 1950's versus the Idora of the 1970's and 1980's?

K: There is no comparison. It seemed like everybody in the 1970's had a different attitude, not with the management and that, the customers. They thought they were being ripped off all the time. To me, it seemed that way, not all of them but too many of them. They expected Idora to compete with places like Cedar Point. They would say, "I went up to Cedar Point. They have good rides. They don't have rides like this. They had better rides than this." That is about a \$50 million operation.

In the 1940's it seemed like nobody had anything. There was no big money around. Of course, when I came back from the Army, I only made \$1 an hour and that was no money. That was at G. F. Put it this way: In the 1940's, it didn't take so much to amuse a person. They could go out there and spend the day, sit around and sling the bull, have a couple of rides, eat a hot dog or a bag of popcorn or something and they were content. Now it is go, go, go, go, go.

Like I said, the park was boxed in. There was nowhere for them to go. They couldn't expand. People would say, "Why don't you get some new rides? Why don't you do this? Why don't you do that? Where are you going to put them? Sure, you can get rid of some of them, but boy, did you ever stop to look at the price of some of those rides? Where would they put a \$2 million water ride; they would never get it paid for. That is what they wanted. They wanted about that much to put a new one in. Even if they replaced one, there was no way they could afford that much money because they would never get it back.

I think it was just something that was bound to happen. Craig Beach went down the hill the same way. Of course, that management was a lot worse, not that they did anything wrong at Idora. What I mean is that Craig Beach didn't seem to want to spend any money period.

T: Which decade was the best for you at Idora, the 1940's, the 1950's, the 1960's, et cetera and why?

K: I would say right around mid-1950's to mid-1960's. I think that would be about the best for picnicwise and everything. Everybody was making money. It wasn't until after the mid-1960's when these companies started feeling the pinch. The unions were getting stronger. Everybody wanted more money, so the companies started getting tightfisted.

United used to have about three shindigs out at Idora every summer. The last time I think they had a picnic I don't think there were 500 people there. Before, they used to pack them in there.

Mullin's Manufacturing, they had two plants. They had one in Salem and one in Warren. That was two separate picnics. Two separate Saturdays you had a picnic. Mullin's from Salem was one day on Saturday and maybe not the next Saturday, but the following Saturday it would be Mullin's from Warren.

They were good picnics, spent money; they did. All over you can name them by the hundreds, the picnics they had. They were smaller picnics; they were friendly people that you could put two or three of them together and they still wouldn't be crowded.

Beaver Valley, if it wasn't for Beaver Valley, Idora would have been in trouble long before. You used to see some of those kids from Beaver Valley so often that you got to know them by name, yes. There would be the Beaver Valley schools and then there would be something else from Beaver and then there would be another one just enjoying it that they ran around together with. That would be a day. I'm telling you; you would see those kids so much that you would get to know them by name, some of them, not all of them. There were some great times out there.

T: Were there any humorous events that stand out in your mind when you look back at your career at Idora Park?

K: Those are probably the ones I forgot about, on purpose.

T: Any unusual times that you will never forget?

K: I haven't thought about that. A couple of times when they soaped the water ride, that was quite a feat. They dumped about four bottles of Joy in the back of the tank. Anybody could walk back there. Like I said, that roadway went around back. You came off the Turtle and you could walk around the back in there. That is probably what somebody did. They threw about three, four, five bottles of Joy in the tank. That foam covered the whole thing. Suds covered the whole front end of the building.

There was one little guy who worked in the back. He said, "Give me a broom. I'll sweep it as I go down the hill." He came down the hill in a boat and all you could see was the suds moving.

When he hit the bottom with his broom, all you saw was the tip of his broom. You didn't see him, the boat, or anything. That is how thick the suds were. We had to drain the water, scrub it out, wash it out, wash it out with a fire hose, and fill it back up again. I think they got it twice that year, but that first one was the dandy.

T: Some practical joker.

K: There are some pictures around of that that would be worth having. You couldn't see any shrubs, nothing, nothing but soap. Once it came out of the pump . . . The pump was pumping up the falls.

T: Did this happen when the ride was in operation?

K: Yes.

T: Did it have to be shut down?

K: Oh sure. That had to be shut down, sure. We were there until 3:00 in the morning draining it and scrubbing it. Sure, that went down the rest of the night. Once you got the people out, well, that was it. It so happened on a night that wasn't really busy.

The way that works . . . If you caught it from the front, you could shut the chain down. That stops the chain so any boats in the back can't go up the hill. All you would have to do was walk those people out and give them their money back. No way could you ride it. I'm telling you; those suds had to be twelve feet high. Of course, the management didn't think it was very cute or very clever.

They caught a couple of guys later on. I think it was the following year and the judge got them for \$1,500 a piece. I don't imagine they were in the mood to do anymore soaping. They were older guys too. I think one was thirty-two and one was twenty-seven. They probably heard about it and figured for kicks they were going to do it. I forget how they got caught. Somebody saw the soap coming in the back so they got the guys up the hill and they shut the chain down. They went and got a cop. By that time the water was going to the pump. So it just came out of the pump. They got the two guys. They rapped them \$1,500 a piece.

T: With the aid of hindsight, would you have made any changes in your job to make it better?

K: Changes in my job?

T: Changes in the way the park was run?

K: Not me. I don't know anything about that end of the deal. I thought they ran a good operation. It's just that I think time caught up with them. All of the factors, employment was going down; all of these companies weren't laying out the money; transportation was bad. Like I said, a lot of people used to ride the buses to come out there to the park, especially on Sunday.

They used to have a lot of polkas out there. I loved it. I used to go down to the ballroom and watch them dance. They used to sprinkle this wax stuff over the midway and they would dance out on the midway. You used to have a good time.

I miss those [days], but as far as bands and that, I never cared too much. You don't see them anymore. They would run about maybe six a year in the summer, maybe a month apart or something like that, six, big bands. I think it was more fun when the park plan was there. Even when it was a Sunday matinee or something like that, there were people. I don't think everybody wants to go hear big bands. A park is for amusement.

When I was working the dance hall, they used to run on Monday nights . . . They called it Social Night. I think it was 50¢ a night to dance all night. All the rest of the time it was park plan. Some nights on Social Night you would get quite a few people. It was more or less a novelty then and it was cheap.

Some of those guys who would like to dance would spend \$5 for tickets a night, no kidding. They were dancing fools. When the park plan was there, the number would last three minutes. Even at seven for 50¢, that is only twenty-one minutes worth of dances. Some of those guys spent the money.

For an amusement park I thought it was better. If it was possible to have two ballrooms in a park--it would have to be a bigger place than this--then you have one for big dancing. I don't think big bands can pay for it. You would have to have one every night and they wouldn't get anything. Nobody liked it. Nobody wanted to pay that money either. It used to be that you only paid 10¢ to get in. Even if you didn't spend 10¢ dancing, it only cost you 10¢ to get into the ballroom. Some of those old-timers used to come out and sit on the bench and watch. They would pay 10¢ to get in and spend an evening just watching them dance. After they did away with that, it was the pay. They couldn't afford to pay any \$3 or \$4 just to get in to sit and watch them dance.

T: Is there anything else that you think is important to add that we haven't discussed?

K: No, I don't know of anything that is important. I say it is just too bad that nobody ever kept a record of it, of anything.

T: All the records went up in smoke?

K: Everything, pictures. I even inquired. One of my neighbors up here, his grandson was visiting him from out of state. He asked me to get him a couple of postcards from the park. They didn't even have a postcard at the park.

Years ago at the drugstore at the corner of Parkview right there, the guy used to have a big, tall rack of postcards of Idora Park, all different rides, all different night shots, when the lights were on, when the water was coming over the falls and that. Then they used to have those folders with about eight or ten postcards. But they didn't have one postcard, not one. The kid just wanted a couple of souvenirs. I never was one to keep stuff, but I thought that was terrible that they didn't have any postcards. As it turned out, it would have been nice to have a couple of packets of postcards or something.

Some of those people out there were buying old nameplates and old spikes from the coaster that were laying on the ground from the Wildcat. They would go for \$5.

T: This was at the auction?

K: No. It was Labor Day night, the end of the park, not the auction.

The auction, it was weird. I never saw one. I never went to an auction in my life. I sure hated to see that one. Some of the scraps that the people dug up to try to get rid of was unbelievable.

Years ago when the swimming pool was there, they used to have a big building halfway around the Kiddie Land. The filter plant was right in the middle. On the left side was the ladies' entrance. On this side was the men's entrance. When you went in, they gave you a bag for your clothes. After you came out, your towel and stuff. You changed and after you got done changing, you went out swimming.

They had these laundry baskets made out of slanted wood with coasters on them, casters. They had a couple of them down in the shop. I told Mike, "You ought to keep that, Mike. That is in pretty good shape. That is going to be worth something someday." They got beat up, thrown up on the truck. But all of those laundry baskets were all in good shape, which would have been a hell of a nice souvenir now. A lot of stuff like that was laying around.

Most of those old-timers, almost all of the old-timers who I know . . . This man and woman who had the bingo, they died. This woman who ran the popcorn stand, she just died here a couple of weeks ago. Whoever figured old man Duffy would go like that? Old man Cavalier was getting up in years. Then

when he took that fall out there, that didn't help. He fell off a scaffold. It didn't help him at all. Mrs. Duffy is still living.

T: Yes, I spoke to Marcella.

K: I think I saw her once after the auction. They were at the park one day. I used to stop out once in a while and sling the bull there. At the end of June they told me that that was it and that they were gone; I never went back after that. That was June of last year.

You would hate to go down in that parking lot. There were broken bottles all over the place. They had another fire. Where the ball park was they had a little refreshment shed over there. Somebody started that on fire.

If they ever burn the dance hall, that will be it. They used to have some good shows in there. I worked there when they had dog shows and they had sports shows and car shows. I would go down to reinforce the floor when they used to put trout tanks in there. At one time they were considering digging out under the dance hall and putting a bowling alley in there. That would be so damn noisy with a dance hall upstairs. Nothing was ever done. They just used it for storage.

T: I want to thank you for your time.

K: You're welcome, sir. There was a lot of stuff out there. You just can't recall it all in one time.

T: There was the incident where they used to supply the refreshments with an old push cart with big wheels on it. They would put ice cream bars and candy bars in there and push it up the midway. Everything was done the hard way then, by hand.

T: Times have changed.

K: That is one of the things that caused the downfall of the park: The fact that everybody got automobiles. They don't think anything of getting on a super highway. There were no super highways to go to Sandusky or down to Kings Island. Moneywise they are getting back now to where they were then.

When I first started the park, I was making 30¢ an hour in 1937 or 1938 working in the refreshment stands or working on one of the rides taking tickets or helping the operator. When I went to work in 1940 at Fireproofing, they hired me at 40¢ an hour.

END OF INTERVIEW