

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Idora Park Project

Refreshment Manager Experience

O. H. 833

CHARLES RINDIN

Interviewed

by

Rob Toti

on

November 13, 1986

MICKEY RINDIN

Charles "Mickey" Rindin was born on October 27, 1929, the son of Maxwell and Florence Rindin in Youngstown, Ohio. He and his family moved to Shields Road in Boardman during 1936 and he was educated in the Boardman School System. Mickey is the son of one of Idora Park's co-owners, so it was very logical that he began to help out at the park while he was still a youngster. When he was twelve, Mickey started taking tickets and from 1945 to 1946 he operated the merry-go-round. During this time period, Mr. Rindin became increasingly interested in music. He graduated from Boardman High School and attended Youngstown College from 1947 to 1949.

Mr. Rindin became a professional musician and served in the United States Second Army Band from 1951 to 1953. When he returned from the service, Mr. Rindin became the refreshment manager at Idora Park. This is a job he continued to hold until the park closed in 1985. He has two children, Charles Jr. and Robin, and is a widower. Currently, Mr. Rindin is semi-retired and works at McCrones Appliances in Boardman. He attends Good Hope Lutheran Church and enjoys flying, fishing, and cars.

Rob Toti

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INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES RINDIN

INTERVIEWER: Rob Toti

SUBJECT: Early jobs, refreshment manager, rides

DATE: November 13, 1986

T: This is an interview with Charles Rindin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Idora Park, by Rob Toti, at 777 Havenwood Drive, on November 13, 1986, at 10:30 a.m.

First of all, Mickey, could you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

R: Yes, I was born in Youngstown. My dad was at Idora Park when I was born here. I grew up, the very earliest years, just near the Farmer's Curb Market in Youngstown. My dad was also managing that. The Deibel family owned the park and he worked for them. So, he worked at the park in the summertime and managed the Farmer's Curb Market. It wasn't too long after that time, I would suppose 1932 perhaps, that his full time was devoted to the park.

We then moved to Boardman in 1936 on Shields Road and we were kind of out in the country. They called us farmers then, really. I suppose I had as normal of a childhood as anybody else would have. It was just; go to school, play, and visit my grandparents in Pennsylvania in the summertime.

In 1942, everybody went to war. So, that was my first real introduction to the park, other than just going out to ride rides and going to the Youngstown Browns baseball games. At that time my dad said, "Boy, we have just got to get somebody to help with little

things. Do you want to learn how to get in the park business?" In 1942 I went to the park and took tickets at the fun house on selected days during the week when they just couldn't get anybody. Everybody was in defense plants or doing something. I continued on. In 1943 I went on the merry-go-round as a ticket taker and that was for two summers. Perhaps, around 1945 or 1946 I became the operator of the merry-go-round. Then it was just work throughout the park, mostly in the rides division. It was operating, ticket taking, maintenance and whatever was required, even through my college years. I was a professional musician for many years. There would be some summers that I would take off with the band and not even be at the park for part of the summer anyhow, but I always had the park to come back to.

In 1951 I went in the service and spent two years with the Second Army Band and when I came out in 1953, then I was given a responsible position at the park, this was the director of the refreshments operation which I knew very little, except how to eat food.

It progressed from there. Then we just . . . Kind of a normal course of events. We had to develop and upgrade the thing and get new ideas, new input, new products, develop them and develop a crew, hopefully one that will return year after year. Our young people, of course, we would maybe get them two years and if we got them for a third, this would be in high school and early college years, then fine. We have our experience back, we have always had our stand managers that we had for years and years. You are working with them and during the winter, product development. Of course, in 1955 we remodeled the ballroom and at that point we got into winter dances and exposition shows and that type of thing. On it went. What can you ask me about all of this?

T: First of all, you say that you got involved in the park in 1942. How old were you at the time?

R: Twelve.

T: Now, you have traced your career at the park, could you explain some of your jobs in a little more detail?

R: Well, there is not too much to explain about ticket taking, that is almost self explanatory. Ride operation, there again you have got the persons on the ride, you operated the ride and then you let them back off again, that is the detail.

T: This was before admission fee was added to the park?

- R: At that time there was no admission fee. In the early days, you purchased a ride ticket at each ride. In 1954 they went to what they called the universal ticket system, in which you bought your tickets. Certain rides took two tickets, others take three, some four and some five. At that point we had, perhaps, four central locations for selling universal tickets. Prior to that, every ride had their own ticket seller. That was kind of an upgrading of the system in that you were able to cut down on cashiers. There isn't too much more to explain about that. If something broke, you fixed it. If you have customers, you gave them a ride for their tickets.
- T: Do you remember how much the carousel or merry-go-round cost at that time?
- R: Boy, you are going to search my mind. There is a figure in my mind, back at that time of it costing, for the child . . . I don't remember what the tickets cost, but they were in odd figures on our rides, as I recall, and I am going to say, and not be exact, that it cost \$.08 for the child to ride and \$.12 for the adult. We had different prices.
- T: That was a beautiful ride. How often was it painted, do you remember offhand?
- R: It was a case of painting it when it needed painting. The outboards on the ride, I don't recall that they were ever painted or the inboard scenery which was around the motor house was never done. That was brought back with various chemicals that people in that profession have available and knowledge of using, which would bring out the originals, the horses and platforms. The platforms were painted every year. The horses, I couldn't tell you how often they were done, but I can tell you every Saturday morning the brass poles on the merry-go-round were polished because that was part of my job back then too. Of course, you would have about fifteen or twenty or thirty customers and have all the fingerprints showing right up again. It had to be done every Saturday, that was a ritual.
- T: In 1951 you took on your new job as head of the refreshments?
- R: No, 1953.
- T: Could you explain that job in greater detail?
- R: It involved, back then, the purchase of the goods that you were going to sell. It involved the paper products right through to the perishable products; hot dogs, hamburgers, et cetera. Back then we didn't have a lot

more than that on the Midway. Hot dogs and hamburgers were the feature. This involved the hiring of help, the training of help, and, unfortunately occasionally, saying goodbye. It was very, very simple back then, you had griddles. Some stands didn't have food at all, we would have pop from the root beer barrels, bottled pop in coolers, potato chips on the racks and they were just very simplistic operations. That all changed. Natural evolution of the food industry for one thing and secondly, trying to stay on top of it to get more dollars, offering things. Eventually, we did develop products that people . . . When pay gate days came about, they would actually pay their way to come into the park to eat, which is kind of foolish but fine for the park. We had a two type gate. We had the admission gate, just to come in and be there and secondly, we had all day ride passes. Either way gave you admission to the park.

T: What kind of hours did you work at your job as head refreshments?

R: Generally, starting when you got a weather break, any time in late March or early April, you went in at 9:00 or earlier if you had to be there earlier. You might have a specified delivery that said we had to be there at 8:30 and that meant be there at 8:30 or 8:00. I went to refrigeration school in 1955 because of the fact that very often you would have mechanical and refrigeration breakdowns. There was a lot of refrigeration even back in 1955 in the park, and of course, probably, a fourth or even less than that of what was in the park when the park closed. If you had refrigeration breakdowns, it could involve being there all night long. That happened many, many times. Way back, I can't tell you when all that changed, we used to close at midnight, so it was 9:00 until midnight. Then we backed it up an hour and toward the latter years it backed up yet another hour. You would open, on a regular basis, from 1:00 to 10:00.

Now, if you have special events and picnics booked in then, and this would mean, perhaps, that they were booked in at 9:00, you would even open the park at 9:00 in the morning. The general public wouldn't be aware of it, but the special group that was coming in was certainly aware of it. They probably were more like family outings involving labor unions who sponsored the picnic, companies who sponsored the picnic. I can give examples of B & W Tube Company from Beaver Falls. If there was a Saturday picnic, the general public knew that the park was open 1:00 to 10:00 and B & W people knew that at 9:00 in the morning we were ready to roll for them. They would start coming in their buses and cars and start piling in there early in the morning.

T: Could you tell me a little bit more about those company days or kiddie days or ethnic days?

R: Back quite a few years ago, probably in the 1950's more so than the latter years, we had ethnic days. I can recall big Hungarian Days, they were sponsored by the Hungarian groups in town. The Slovak groups, the German groups, the Serbian groups, Italian groups, they would sponsor the day. Very often they would present something in our picnic pavilions in the food line to help pay for their end of the day. They would even have dances that were in costume in the ballroom in the afternoon.

As far as the ethnics, we even got into an Aliquippa Sunday School Day, which was black. This was sponsored by the Baptist churches from Youngstown all the way down into Wheeling, West Virginia. That was a big event of the year too. It was always the very latter part of July or early August.

Most nationality groups, at one time while they were strong, had days at the park. Irish, I can't think of any that weren't there. They were very, very big days and what probably caused them to go down over the lot of years was that so often, to use a very poor example, maybe a Slovak would marry a Hungarian and they would say that it was really not my day and kid's day, it is really not theirs. Those start the younger people to break away from it. The Hungarian picnic was one of the biggest and towards the end it was mostly just older Hungarians. They never really rode the rides. As their days would go down in attendance, the interest would drop away. Perhaps, toward the end, we were so heavily booked on industrial picnics that industrial picnics on Sunday just took their place.

In the early years, Sundays, you could almost count on a nationality day of some type. Toward the latter years of the park, industrial union picnics took their place because that was the only room we had for them, was moving them into Sundays. We even had Monday picnics when the park was normally closed. That was only day that some . . . Just bring to mind, Copperweld Steel in Warren, that was the day they could come on a picnic, a Monday. You could count on losing your day off, not that you really ever got it but employees did.

T: Approximately, when did the nationality days start to fade away?

R: If I could pinpoint a date, I would say, in the early 1970's they started dwindling. Then there was a resurrection of one year, I recall, they had gotten into not

one Italian Day, but three different lodges and churches had formed Italian Days and they weren't highly successful. Then they kind of faded away too. I would almost have to get a diary out to tell you when the park closed what nationality days were left. I would probably say that Hungarian Day was the last of the nationality days.

T: Did they have to put a down payment on the park or set up some kind of arrangement, how exactly did it work?

R: It was booked as their day. It was up to them to almost man the gates. They would sell little bangles and different badges designating their nationality. Like on Italian Day, they had a little pin that they would wear. When they came through the gate, those that had come for the day would almost always buy a little pin to wear, particularly on Italian Day with the colors of the Italian flag on the little pin. I don't really have the input on that that some of the others could give you. Pat Duffy, of course is no longer with us, but Lenny Cavalier could. As far as how they were booked, was not my end of it. If I was to provide food or something to the pavilions, that was my end of it.

T: Okay, let's get back to your job as head of refreshments. You explained some of the refreshments that you sold, could you name some of the other ones?

R: You mean other than hot dogs and hamburgers?

T: Yes.

R: Yes, I guess we could get pretty involved in that thing. We are talking all soft drinks, we are talking . . .

T: What kind of soft drinks?

R: What were the biggest sellers, you mean?

T: Yes.

R: We had every kind of flavor. The colas of course were the biggest. We were exclusive Pepsi Cola for all those many years. Root beer would come in a close second and what we called a still orange drink which would be in the big bubblers that you saw, would probably come in third. After that you could get into the 7 Up type drink, which were really lithiated lemon drinks. We had it as 7 Up, we had Uptown and many different variations of lithiated drink. Of course, you had to have what we called a flavor drink like cherry or grape, those were your basic soft drink

lines. We had coffee and we had beer in selected locations in the park. For thirty years it was bottled beer and then as we updated through the years it got into strictly draft beer on the Midway as well as in the ballroom and in what we called the old Heidelberg Gardens, which was a restaurant\beer garden, if you will. What else did you want to know about that? The other foods you mentioned?

T: Yes, you could name the other foods too.

R: Okay. Well, one of the biggest things that we developed in the very early 1960's was a hot dog on a stick and cheese on a stick. It was nowhere around here. It was so taken that every year for, probably, the first five years, it was doubling from the year before. It was to the point that buses would be unloading and people would be heading up the Midway, couldn't wait from year to year, were going up for their hot dog on a stick. Of course, the french fries in the park, as greasy as they were, they just loved them.

T: Do you remember, offhand, when you switched over from glass containers to plastic or paper containers?

R: I wouldn't remember that because it was before I came into the park as head of refreshments. One time, I am going to say prior to 1951, they used to serve root beer at two places in the park called root beer stands. They served them in mugs. We served Richardson Root Beer and they were in glass mugs. We had counter washers, they were built into the counter where you just pressed down on the mug and it squirted all over the mug, and you set them back up and served your root beer that way. The pop, itself, was in bottles. That means it was all glass. There was very little paper around the park. We would keep small cups around for persons who say, "Well, I want to give some to my little baby." The bottle pop was served with straws, but we would have to keep a few cups. When I am talking about, a few, probably a case ran the whole season.

In 1959, we at that point became 100 percent draft type pop. This was out of post mix dispensers. The pop was actually made right in the bowl of the dispenser and dispensed out into a cup. It involved syrup coming one way and carbonated water coming the other and they would mix. That was just another part of the job, getting the proper mix and we called it "Brix" Testing. We had to do that on a very regular basis to keep the machines in adjustment so that the pop tasted the way it should.

We opened additional refreshment stands through the

years. We opened even one of them in the ballpark. When we had events in there, we could go in there and just set up everything. All kinds of pieces of equipment were moved in there and actually set up a pop machine, a beer dispenser, and hot dog machines so that we could operate in the ballpark and perhaps an hour or two later, close it down and haul it out of there again.

T: Could you tell me a little bit about the ballpark events?

R: Ballpark events were, when we had a baseball league in the park, those were on scheduled days. The leagues would set up their own ball games and we would service that. Then we had special events such as the "King and his Court" who was a super fast pitcher. He would be a yearly thing. We had wrestling matches, we had boxing matches and those would not necessarily be on a continuing basis. They might go for one season and then at the end of the season be evaluated and the next year some other thing would come in. We had antique auto shows, hot rod shows, and custom auto shows in the ballpark. Company union picnics would have, what they called, races and games in the ballpark usually on the morning of their day. They would have sack races and rope pulling and all of that kind of thing and award prizes. Then they would adjourn the ballpark and go out into the main amusement park for their day. Those were almost always morning events. Occasionally, you would get an afternoon ball game maybe between the company end of the company and the union end of the company and they would sponsor an afternoon ball game. That wasn't the usual thing, but it did happen. I couldn't even, at the moment, recall all of the things that went on in the ballpark.

T: Could you describe for me the Kiddie Days that took place at the park?

R: Yes, there were three or four of them a year. They were called Three Cent Days and that is how much the ride cost them. They would come in various ways. The Sanitary Milk Company had a Three Cent Day, the Vindicator had a Three Cent Day, Schwebel's Bakery had a Three Cent Day and somewhere along the line someone else may have gotten into the act on that. These events were done many different ways, but theirs was done as a Three Cent Kiddie's Day. Every ride cost three cents. I would withhold the Wildcat coaster on that, it cost more than three cents but in most cases the kiddies couldn't ride it anyhow, they were too small. As far as the other rides, they were considered to be three cents a piece and very, very crowded.

T: Now, you say that most of the people arrived by bus.

R: No, I didn't say that.

T: Or by car.

R: Right.

T: When did the park lines close down, do you remember?

R: The park what?

T: The park lines, the trolley?

R: I can't put a date on that. I am not really sure. Even up until nearly the last days of the park, there was a trolley of some kind running, but it was no longer turning around at the park, it was merely coming within a block of the park and going on down other avenues and had a new routing. It was still the Idora . . . I think it was called the Twenty Idora, the bus company.

Of course, the early years were streetcars. I barely remember that. It got into the trackless trolley after that. They were big buses but they were electrically driven with overhead lines. After that they got into diesel buses and I can't really tell you the time. You see, they used to have a turnaround at the park. It would come down on the Idora line and they would turn around and head back out the other way and then they would change the sign from Idora 20 to 5 South. At that point, they went downtown and out to the south side somewhere. Five South turned around, I believe, on Midlothian and then it became 20 Idora and then it just backtracked the whole route and ended up at Idora.

In the latter years, the bus company had big problems as far as ridership and they were cutting back on lines and cutting back hours. It used to be like every ten minutes there would be a bus there and at that point they no longer used the turnaround at the park, but instead just routed through other areas of the south side coming close to the park, let's say within a block or two. I suppose they were still . . . Yes, they were. They were doing that even when the park closed.

T: What were the busiest years for the park?

R: 1980 was the biggest year in the history of the park, far and away.

T: That seems kind of strange to me.

R: How so?

T: Just from what I have heard and read and seen that maybe the late 1950's or early 1960's would have been the biggest years.

R: No, as far as refreshment division, which, of course, I kept all the books on and I submitted all the inventories and inventory reports, stand reports and everything on it. Of course, I know what the refreshment stands took in. I also read the registers and I even, at times, counted money. 1980 was far and away the biggest season the park had ever had, this would be in attendance and gross monies.

T: Approximately how many employees worked at the park?

R: It would vary depending on the time of year. We used to start out with a ton of part time people because one of the biggest days that we had was the opening day of the park. Specifically, it was WHOT's Spring Thing. At that point, you could almost look for a let down for about a month. So, those that you had used for WHOT's Spring Thing may not have been recalled to work for another month. The stand managers and what we called full time people would work weekends until around Memorial Day, at which time we would . . . Well, it wasn't specifically Memorial Day, it was the time that the city schools were let out. At that time we went into what we called a full time schedule, which would be six days a week.

Earlier years, the park would only be open evenings during the week, 7:00 till 10:00, 11:00 or 12:00, whatever it was at the time, I don't recall. But for probably the past twenty years the park has been open six days a week. To be sure we opened by 1:00 and as I say, special events might open it earlier and keep it open later. Now, I forgot what question you asked me.

T: Well, basically I was talking about employees, how many worked at the park.

R: Employees, okay. As the season went on and we were getting more heavily booked, refreshment division probably employed close to seventy persons. The park, generally around 250.

T: Now you mentioned Spring Thing, would you like to elaborate on Spring Thing, when it started and how it grew?

R: It started as a promotion of WHOT, in order to get a lot of people into the park, have a big day with a lot of bands going all over the place, and all their disk jockeys and personnel there to greet people. It was a

way, I guess, to have persons employed at their station meet those that they are broadcasting to on a regular basis and they were very, very popular. A lot of these people just . . . You know, all they were were voices on the air. So this was a promotion of theirs in order to get all the popular bands out at the park and they would go on and on for twelve hours. In the meantime, all of the popular disk jockeys would be out there greeting people and doing a live broadcast too. It just became a popular thing. It was bigger and bigger and bigger until, finally, the year that the park . . . It was one week after the fire, was the WHOT Spring Thing. It was a big day, not as big as it had been in the past.

I suppose a lot of the young people thought, "Well, what kind of a day can I have? Half of the park is burnt up." Half of the park wasn't burnt up. Really the major attraction of the park was burnt up, the Wildcat Coaster, but really the whole park . . . We operated and functioned. We had part of our Midway burnt out and we brought in portable refreshment stands and they operated in that section. Portable game units were put in where the fire had been after, of course, it had been cleared by bulldozers and things. That year was still a pretty big WHOT day.

T: So, would you say that Spring Thing was one of your most successful attractions?

R: No doubt about it, because it was so strong for so many years. Exactly how many I couldn't tell you, it went back to the early days of Dick Biondi, who I am sure you never heard of.

T: No.

R: Well, Dick Biondi was a crazy man over there. He did such things as weekend stunts sitting on a flagpole at the park. He would stay up there for thirty-six hours on top of the flagpole and be broadcasting half of the night.

The next most popular guy that came along was Boots Bell, and I think Boots is still around somewhere. Then into other guys that I really don't even know. I got to meet them on WHOT day, but it was not my type of listening so I never really knew their names that well.

T: You mentioned the Wildcat. Could you give me a brief history of the Wildcat or tell me anything you know about it?

R: I can tell you that I understand it was built during the Depression, that would be starting in 1929. The

Wildcat in 1929, or after its completion- it was built by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company, the same company that built the carousel- it was so wild that they actually had to tame it down. That was probably around 1933, 1934, or 1935, in there somewhere that they took the first drop and they spiraled it around the top and then dropped it straight down. It used to come right off the chain and into an immediate bank, it was just too wild. Even after they tamed it down it was wild. It was considered one of the best roller coasters in the world and by the number of people that came to ride that, including coaster enthusiast groups, I guess it must have been. I started riding when I was seven, so this was in about 1937. I do recall the early drop. I don't remember whether I recall riding that ride or not. It would just actually come off of the top of the hill and the chain and dropped right away into a steep bank curve and then it would continue on as it is, not today because it is burned away, but as it had been. So, the coaster had been changed and tamed in the early 1930's.

T: What was it like meeting up with roller coaster enthusiasts from across the country?

R: Really there was not much you could say about them except that they had an association and still do. They would come to the park from far and wide and they would just ride and ride and ride the darn thing and talk about other coasters. I suppose that is where the rating of the six best roller coasters in the world came from. It is amazing that so many roller coasters that are around, that two of them were in Ohio. One was ours and the other one was at King's Island. When they talk enthusiast, they talk with motorcycles, vans, cars, trucks, or whatever. Maybe they would meet, they would all have their jackets on. We had an enthusiast group, I can't specify the year exactly but it was probably close to 1980, that was scheduled in there on a May Sunday and it was raining so hard that we never did open the park but we did run the coaster for the enthusiast group.

T: Could you tell me a little bit about the Lost River? Now, I know it has undergone many name changes, could you recall a few of them?

R: I only recall two names on that ride. A lot of people think that the name of it may have been the Tunnel of Love because, perhaps, comic strips and movies always showed one of those boat rides going through the dark tunnels as the Tunnel of Love. Our Tunnel of Love is actually an electrically driven little car that went through darkened corridors. Our ride was called The Rapids. The Rapids, if I could just kind of put a

date on that- very early 1970's- was changed to the Lost River. Really the only difference was that we took the windmill down and they replaced that with a grass hut and a native type guy beating on a drum. From there they put elephants and jungle scenery all over the entrance and then the scene sheds were changed, of course too . . . They depicted things that you might think that you were going to see if you were going down a river in the jungle somewhere. It was called the Lost River later, The Rapids earlier, and I don't recall any other names for that ride.

T: Are there any other interesting bits of information concerning any of the other rides, say the Jack Rabbit or the airplanes, bumper cars, or the Hooterville Highway?

R: Well, those rides never changed a whole lot. The Jack Rabbit, of course, never changed except the final year we called it the Back Wabbit. We turned the cars backwards and you rode it backwards and it was different. It wasn't my thing. I liked it the way it was, frankly. That ride was built in 1910 and basically it never changed in all that time.

As far as some of the other rides in the park, rides came and then they left. You would have a ride until it lost its popularity and then you would sell it off and bring in something new. We even did such things as trading with other amusement parks. They would have something that was fading for them and be new for us, I am thinking of the Wild Mouse, we had that in for, I think, three summers. It came from a park down near Pittsburgh. We, in turn, sent them a couple of our rides. Then our rides came back and it was kind of a fresh thing to bring our rides back after, perhaps, three seasons and announce that they were back in the park again and that park got their Wild Mouse back.

Other than that, there were changes in the fun house building. That was originally a walk through fun house where you would go from one thing to the other; through the mirrors and through the barrel. If you would fall down, they would help you get up and then they would go on slides and different things or contraptions that you would walk over and electric seats, and electric rails where you got shocked. Eventually, that got changed into just strictly a walk through with all kinds of scene sheds in it and things.

The electrically driven cars up at that end had many, many names. I can't even recall them all. I ran it for a couple of summers and I don't even remember what it was called then. We just called it the dark ride. Many of the guys, particularly the older guys, maybe

even . . . You said you interviewed Ducky. I am not sure, he probably just called it the dark ride. But it had Tunnel of Love on it, it had . . . I can't even tell you all the names it had, the Gold Mine. They had it as a gold mine ride at one time. It had gold nuggets on all the cars and they were strictly cut out of wood and painted with gold paint. Then it got into a Western theme towards its latter years. It had Western scenes inside of it, but it was the same old ride for all those many years. It was the same old cars, we just changed the looks of them and changed the scene sheds. Towards the latter years of it, it was a much longer ride than it had been earlier. We had it routed, actually, in back of the old fun house and in the other side and the far side was actually the cars going around, the people inside the fun house didn't know what was going on. The people who rode the ride got a much longer ride out of it.

T: Were there ever any injuries that occurred?

R: In the park?

T: In the park or on the rides?

R: Sure, there were injuries on the rides and there were, actually, deaths. I don't know of any cases where there was negligence on the park. There was a lad, that I recall, killed on the Jack Rabbit. He got out in front of the front guard on it and was riding the thing backwards kind of like he was on a wild horse or something. People in the Jack Rabbit cars were begging him to get back in before he got hurt. He hit a little dip on the backstretch and it threw him. It killed him.

I remember a bunch of young sailors from the Reserve in 1948, they had gone somewhere and had more to drink than they ought to. After their Reserve meeting they came to the park and one got on the Wildcat and he stood up and he was thrown. He ended up in back of the merry-go-round somewhere on the ground. He was killed.

As far as other things, there were always cut fingers and sprained ankles and those things, they happened. When you get a first rain after a busy, busy day where a lot of ice cream and pop have been spilled on the Midway and you get a light rain, some places got very slippery.

T: What do you remember about the swimming pool?

R: Not a whole lot. I went there swimming when I was a young guy. I remember we had what we called the blue

boards where we could walk out in the water and dive off of the blue boards. Then we had the Center Tower. It was a very lovely pool, as a matter of fact. It had a sand beach and one time they introduced salt water bathing, which was an innovation. Eventually, the sand beach got replaced with cement and then the pool was used for a couple of years as a boat ride. Then it became filled in and became Kiddie Land.

T: Do you know why it was filled in and became Kiddie Land?

R: Yes. Contrary to what a lot of people think, they thought there were race problems that had caused the closing of the pool, and that wasn't it at all. What it amounted to, basically, was that the city pools were operating for \$.05 and we couldn't survive charging \$.05 to get in. I don't know how . . . I suppose because maintenance on city pools was done by city employees. You know, that was just part of their given day. They may go to a pool and do maintenance and then go about their other maintenance duties, where we had to keep maintenance people right there. I guess we had to pay more to our lifeguards and maintenance people on the pool and it just couldn't survive at \$.05. So, you were competing against the city pools and we just got to a point where we could no longer do it. It just was not feasible. Eventually, that would just close the pool.

T: You talked about fees to the pool, when was the fee to the admission of the park added, the straight up admission fee?

R: Coming close, I would say 1969. It may very well have been 1968.

T: Do you remember approximately how much it was?

R: I believe it was \$1 to get in at that time, that was just the general admission, and all day ride passes, I am trying to recall that, would be about \$3.50 or \$4.00.

T: Can you compare that to when the park closed?

R: Yes. It seems to me that when the park closed, although as I say I wasn't out on that end of the operation, signs were posted and I could have very well absorbed it but I never did, I believe it was \$7.95 for an all day ride pass. Then we had a 5:00 to 10:00 ride pass which was \$4.95 and a \$2 general admission fee. There again Lenny Cavalier could tell you exactly because Lenny Cavalier handled that end of it.

T: You mentioned Lenny Cavalier. Could you talk a little bit about some of the partners such as Charlie Deibel, the Duffys, Andy Anderson, and Rex Billings?

R: Andy Anderson was a partner of senior Duffy. This wouldn't be Pat Duffy that we are referring to, it would be his dad. His dad, my dad, and Tony Cavalier's were partners. They bought the park in 1947 from the Deibel family. At that time Mr. Deibel had passed away but his daughters owned the park after his death. Then they sold the park, his son, Victor, was involved and he had a son in Cleveland and I think he had passed away though. The Murray family was in it. Olive Murray was one of Mr. Deibel's daughters and they sold the park to my dad, Cavalier, and Mr. Duffy in 1947.

Prior to that, Rex Billings was brought in as a manager in the early years of the park, before my time. I never really knew him. The entrance to the park is named Billings's Gate because he had been park manager before my dad was park manager. You have to go back before me. I, of course, knew the name very well. I didn't know him. I met Rex Billings, Jr. who is older than I am. I never met Rex Billings, Jr. at Idora, I met him at Chicago conventions and later on up in Lake Placid, New York where he was operating an amusement park. As far as his dad, I don't know him.

Andy Anderson was an early partner of Pat Duffy, Sr. Pat Duffy was in as a games concessionaire and partnership with Andy Anderson. As of 1947 with my dad and Cavalier and Pat Duffy, Sr., they then became the three owners of the park. Since then . . . Well, they retained the park until it was finally disposed of to Mount Calvary Pentecostal Church.

T: When did that take place?

R: That probably finalized late 1984 or it was in process then. The auction of the park was in October of 1984. It was after that. I think maybe it was finalized, actually, in 1985. That is probably closer.

T: Were you involved at all in the auction that took place?

R: Only in that I presented all of our equipment that we weren't going to retain to operate the ballroom refreshment stand. Goods that we could sell involved mostly paper goods. A lot of memorabilia that hadn't been used for many years was brought out from under storage areas. The old-type root beer barrels that we wouldn't even dream of ever putting into operation, but they were gotten as . . . Well, I remember a fellow who bought two root beer barrels. He had a restaurant

somewhere and he was going to just put them as decorative pieces in his restaurant as memorabilia from Idora Park.

I dug out all of the things that I could get to put into the auction. Of course, paper goods were current stock. As far as perishables, of course, you couldn't sell perishables. This would involve all of the refreshment equipment; griddles, freezers, walk in freezers, a lot of refrigerating units, ice makers, cubers, flakers and that type of thing, and pop making equipment. We retained just enough to operate our shows and dances in the wintertime in the ballroom. We were still booked ahead for another year.

T: Would you say that you had a success at the auction? I mean it is hard to have a success after at least part of the park burns down.

R: Only in that the park business was decreasing. We almost, you could say, got out from under it. I would say the park probably would have survived. It wouldn't have been as viable as it had been, simply because the industrial base was gone. You are probably really too young to know about that. If you hear some of the old timers talking about the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company, which was one of our biggest picnics, into U.S. Steel where we had local picnics all of the unions with Republic Steel where we had local union picnics out of Youngstown and Warren. They didn't exist, they went away. I mentioned the B & W Tube Company earlier that was one of our biggest, came in from Beaver Falls. They used to bring us 20,000 people on a Saturday. Their final year they had less than 2,000 people there because they weren't employing anybody. I could go on and on and on just down the Beaver Valley with the A. M. Byers Co., the H. H. Robertson Company, and American Bridge Company. Nobody, any longer, had a job, including J & L Steel which ran four days the final year. For four days, you couldn't lump them into one day and make a good day out of it. There just was no employment there anymore. That is where the park business went, it wasn't walk in trade because the park never would have survived on walk in trade, it was industrial union picnics, promotional events.

T: Was the park operating in the black?

R: The last year got a little bit hairy. After the fire, attendance dropped way off. People just figured that they wanted to go out and ride the Wildcat and it wasn't there. Most everything else was there. We only lost two rides in that fire, we still had twenty-nine rides there. Let me just put it this way, after the auction and sale, Idora didn't owe anybody anything.

Every bill was paid. We were running behind on some things because we weren't taking in enough money to get our bills and wages paid. That was primary, you paid your employees and you put off some people and you pay when you can. The park closed and Idora didn't owe one nickel to anybody. Everybody had gotten paid off and every person that supplied the park was paid. There were no animosities or hard feelings anywhere, everybody got paid. There was no such thing as filing a Chapter 11 or bankruptcy and everybody got their money.

T: We talked a little bit about the auction, could you kind of describe the atmosphere?

R: It was very, very down. The two days of the auction were very, very down days as far as employees. There again, I was in refreshment operation and I stayed with refreshment operation. We operated refreshments during that sale. We operated one refreshment operation, that would be under the rocket ship ride where we had a pizza stand, pizza and sausage were the feature there. Next door was hot dogs and hamburgs. We even put in french fryers so that we could offer french fries to the public that were there for the auction. Our french fry stand, per se, was closed down and it was a very busy time. We were very busy just like the good, old days but if you would look around, you just saw that was the only thing doing business in the whole park.

I can tell you that the head lady in the pizza stand, for example, when the auctioneer stepped into there and he offered her pizza oven and started bidding on prices, she was standing there and the tears were just rolling down her eyes. Next door, the girl that had operated that for twenty-two years, when they auctioned off her electric charbroiler she just broke down. She was in the corner just crying her eyes out and other employees were there trying to console her. That was the kind of atmosphere that prevailed. I would imagine out on the rides, the guys that operated those rides, when that ride was sold at the auction, "Sold to such and such," that same kind of feeling prevailed there too.

I know the merry-go-round, of course, was the center point of the whole sale. I had very, very mixed emotions about that. My earliest years were spent on the merry-go-round. Here I am down the road twenty or thirty years later, seeing this thing sold at such a phenomenal figure, too. I never realized when I was a youngster what a valuable piece of equipment I was operating.

T: Was there any attempt to try and keep the carousel in Youngstown or in the park?

R: I can't say that there was. I understand that there was an association . . . I don't know what they are called, the Western Reserve something or other. They wanted to bring it to the Canfield Fair and have it as part of the Canfield Fair forevermore. They just couldn't raise the funds and then the park couldn't afford to say, "Well, pay the families that own the park a little bit every year," which they could have done. I wasn't in on that, I don't know how that took place but I have heard talk of it. Of course, as you know, there were pleas in the paper and letters to the editor for it to be put into the Southern Park Mall as a part of history. I can tell you that all that was given was a fast glance. One drive through the park and out the other gates and nothing more was ever heard about that. I won't get into names.

T: My next questions concern the ballroom. Did you actually work in the ballroom in 1955?

R: Did I work in it? In 1955 we did the great remodeling to bring it up to a class act, if you will. The ballroom then became a beautiful part of the park and dancing became a big part of many people's lives. We were then able to attract enough business that we got into many shows, dances, automobile shows and that type of thing, junior chamber of commerce's held a big show in the spring where they would actually have catching live fish in their home shows in the ballroom for many, many years. There was even such a thing as the Stam-baugh Thompson do-it-yourself show which was a big show. The dances were self explanatory. They were sponsored by groups and they rented the ballroom. We operated the refreshments and checking and then they got out and sold tickets. They either hustled and made money or they didn't. Did I work in it specifically? I guess, I operated the refreshment end of it. Of course, if my people were very busy, yes, I worked. I pedaled over the counter just like they did.

T: So, was the ballroom a means for the park to make money during the off months?

R: Sure.

T: Was that the primary purpose of it?

R: Absolutely. We maintained a maintenance shop all winter long. We had people in the park. Of course, we had a very small crew. Perhaps ten or twelve people worked in the maintenance shops all winter long rebuilding rides and repainting, that type of thing. I was on a yearly salary, as were my associates in the park. We had to kind of offset the electrical and

heating expense. Expenses go on during the winter. The ballroom had a very successful winter operation, perhaps a lot more so than summer. A great deal of revenue derived from it.

T: Now, you mentioned some of the exhibits. What type of bands came to the ballroom?

R: After the early remodeling there were still many bands traveling and we brought in every attraction that could be gotten. They were mostly dance bands with the exception of Buddy Rich and Stan Kenton who came in and did concert type things. Stan Kenton was called a dance band but nobody ever danced, they always just listened. Saturday nights we ran what we called Pittsburgh hotel band type music, which was really kind of schmaltzy but very, very danceable music on Saturday night. You could depend on that. Why would you have an attraction that you would not be able to dance to with your wife, your lady friend, your date, or whatever.

T: Was park plan dancing a common thing during the big band era?

R: Never. Park plan dancing was there, again, before my time. I remember it. It did big business, it wasn't part of the big band era unless you talk about the early 1930's being the big band era. I called the big band era the late 1930's and early 1940's and even up through the early 1950's. Park plan dancing was like \$.10 a dance, they would call it that. They would clear the floor and if you wanted to dance the next dance you paid your \$.10 or bought your tickets and put the token in the box and come out and dance, and then they would clear the floor again. I barely recall it, I was just a little kid.

T: A couple of odds and ends, what do you know about the actual name of the park?

R: Boy, you could kick that around real good. Supposedly, there were a group of Indians called Idora Indians, that is one thing. The next thing I heard was a contest to name the park, it came up "I adore a park". I don't know how much truth is in any of that. My dad really couldn't, I don't think, ever tell you how it really happened. The park was built in the late 1800's and we are not really sure how it got named. The Vindicator has come up with several things and I think that is probably where I read them about how the park got named. Right now I am still not sure how it got named.

T: Are there any memorable events that stand out in your

mind when you think of Idora Park?

R: I suppose. I met my first wife there. We were married for twenty-five years, she had a stroke and died. That has got to be memorable. I guess I could say that other than a few things, such as being a musician and being out on the road in lots of parts of summers and wintertimes, what stands out in my mind at Idora Park is that my entire life was spent at Idora Park. Through just about every phase of it. I never was in picnic promotion, and I was never involved in advertising but just about anything else you can put your finger on, I was in there. What else could stand out but an entire lifetime.

T: Were there any funny or peculiar moments that come back to mind?

R: I suppose every day something peculiar happened, yes. It is probably just a strange breed of cat. I find, even now at McCrones, that you get some strange people. This is the general public and we dealt with the general public at the park. The park business, in itself, is no different than being in the automobile business or a department store. You dealt with the general public and, by and large, the general public are a nice bunch of people. But you do have some weirdoes. We didn't have any more than anybody else. We, perhaps, had some that stood out.

We used to have a fellow that . . . He had his sanity but I remember him for twenty years, until he got to be an old man. He would come out and we called him the dancer. He would come into the park, stand in front of the merry-go-round organ, and pace back and forth and grin for maybe eight to ten hours at a time. He never harmed a soul, never did anything. He would buy a hot dog or a hamburger in the day or some other food item and then he would leave quietly.

I recall an Indian guy that was there every Sunday with his braids and Indian garb. He didn't hurt anybody. Why not let him in. It was kind of an attraction. I remember something about him that I remember from my earliest days and I remember even to my latter days. I don't know if it is the nature of an American Indian, I can't see that they guy looked any different thirty years or thirty-five years later. He just still looked the same age and the same everything.

No, there is nothing unusual about the park business. It is pretty much a family oriented thing. As you see, you get a lot of young people. A lot of my people, hopefully, are better people for having worked at the park, having to deal with the public, having to

be . . . Someone watching them over. We called them the den mothers, usually they were stand managers. They didn't let them get away with much. In the park, we kept track of their hours, where they were and what they were doing. I called them my kids because of all the young people that I had every year, I just told them, "Don't ever tell me to lie to your parents about where you were because I will tell them exactly what time you left and what time you started." If you decided to roam half of the night and tell them, "I had to work overtime," they are going to call me and they are going to hear the truth. Hopefully, a lot of those various, little inputs bettered them or helped them, made them better for having worked at the park. Plus putting in some pretty darn tough days. They learn that this is what life is about, you work for it.

The park was certainly good for me. My setbacks were having lost two wives that were part of my life during the park. I was paid well, good enough. I have a nice home and I drive a nice automobile and I have money in the bank and it is all from working at Idora.

T: In all your years at the park, if you could have done anything differently, would you have?

R: Not really. The park business was tough. From early April, since I was the refrigeration service engineer of the park plus operating the refreshment division totally- this is from every end of it, every aspect, and every phase of it- you put in one lot of time. Sometimes I would come home at night just almost be too tired to get out of the car. However, what we always called, when the opening bell rang, you were there for whatever given hours it took to get the job done. When the bell rang again and said that the park is closed, at this point, you pretty much came and went as you pleased. If you had something booked in the ballroom, you made sure it was taken care of and arranged for. You had some slow bookings where your crew could handle it without you being there. If you wanted to go to Florida, go ahead. If you wanted to go to Canada, go ahead. You could kind of arrange it. All you did was tell someone where you were going to be. "I am going to go to Florida in January and February." "Who is going to take care of this?" "Well, such and such is going to handle the refreshment end of the ballroom." As long as you were covered you had your free time. But when the snow started melting again in the spring, don't plan anything. That is just the way it operated.

T: Well, I am all out of questions. I thank you for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW