

This was written for the Paragon Carousel Newsletter.

Childhood Memories

by Donna M. Dube

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As I write this I have just completed a research project for my Preservation and Care of Collections class at Harvard University Extension school. The topic I chose to write about was the Paragon Carousel and its preservation and restoration. I spent a couple of months reading everything I could find about the Philadelphia Toboggan Company and learning about carousel restoration. I visited Mr. Hardison at the Paragon Carousel and Judith Baker at the New England Carousel Museum. I spent hours agonizing over what to include and what could be left out as the paper got longer and longer. (Thank goodness there was no page limit!) The paper ended up being 17 pages long. I was going to send the whole unedited paper for the newsletter but decided it was just too long and technical and that instead I would write about how I came to know, love and write about the Paragon Carousel. If anyone is really interested in reading the paper, it can be found on my web site at <http://www.donnamdube.com/writings/paragon.pdf> (Comments are welcome.)

I don't recall when I first came to know the Paragon Carousel; I just remember it having always been a part of my childhood. Some of my earliest memories are of my family's weekend trips to Hull.

My father and my grandfather were weekend fishermen. They had a 14-foot aluminum boat with an outboard motor. On weekends, very early, before the sun rose, they would load the boat, motor and fishing gear onto a trailer and head for Hull. They would launch the boat down by the old Coast Guard station by the High School and motor out into the gut as the sun began to rise. Later, my mother, grandmother, sister and myself (and sometimes family friends) would load up the car with beach stuff and a picnic lunch and set out for Hull to meet them as they came in.

For us kids, the drive to Hull was always an interminable ride, punctuated with the constant repeated question, "How much longer?" To keep us busy my mother always would give us a box of Chicken in a Biscuit crackers to munch on. The only time I remember getting those crackers as a kid was when we were going to Hull. The taste of them still brings back images of the roller coaster looming on the skyline and the little beach and boat landing at the old Coast Guard station.

It was usually late morning by the time we would arrive. My mother would turn us kids loose on that little strip of beach with our pails and shovels, while she spread out the blankets and set up the beach chairs. My sister and I would spend the rest of the morning playing tag with the little waves created by passing boats while we collected shells, dead crabs, starfish and flat rocks for skipping on the waves. My grandfather taught me how to skip rocks from that beach. All the while we kept watch for my father and grandfather heading for shore in their little silver boat. Eventually they would appear in the distance and arrive just in time for the picnic lunch my mother had packed. Lunch was always the same, crusty Italian bread, slathered with mustard, with cold cuts and cheese, and those little sweet gherkin pickles.

After lunch, my mother and grandmother would pack up the remains of lunch while my father and grandfather played with us kids for a bit then packed up the boat and gear. If it was a

good day fishing they would have a huge garbage barrel filled to brimming with flounder to ice and take home. If it was a bad day fishing, the barrel wouldn't be as full.

Now it was time to go to Paragon Park.

Like I said, I don't remember my first visit to the park or my first ride on the carousel, it seems like it has always been a part of my life. I remember those summer afternoons, playing miniature golf in the shadow of the old wooden roller coaster, which incidentally still operates at the old Wild World Park (now Six Flags America) in Maryland, and playing Skee-ball in the arcade. I don't recall ever riding the coaster then and I wouldn't go near one now, but seeing the familiar curves of it a couple of summers ago, brought the memories flooding back.

I do remember the carousel; it was then and still is my favorite ride. I remember riding round and round, waving to my parents and grandmother, while my grandfather stood next to my horse to make sure I didn't fall off. And later riding by myself when my grandfather did the same for my little sister. It was the first thing to do when we got there and the last thing to do before we left.

When the day was over, my family would pile the exhausted children with their cotton candy stained faces, lugging souvenirs like giant pencils, Paragon Park banners and plastic back scratchers into the car and head for home.

As a teenager in the late 1970's, I remember visiting Paragon Park a few times. At the time we considered it a "baby park" and the beach scene was much more important. As teens, parks like Rocky Point in Rhode Island and Riverside Park with its "new" Loop coaster were larger and had more allure. When the park closed in 1985, I barely blinked and eye.

As I look back, I am sad that Paragon Park is gone. Small family run parks like Paragon just don't exist anymore in this time of huge corporate entities. Children and teens today want bigger and better, its the huge theme parks with frightening thrill rides and expensive souvenirs that survive.

When the opportunity came to write about the preservation of a "built" object for my class, I thought really hard about what to write about. I considered the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island and a number of historic houses in the local area, but nothing I came up with seemed to excite me. I wanted to write about something local, something different, something the instructor hadn't seen a dozen times over and something that meant something to me personally. Then I noticed an old Paragon Park shot glass sitting on my curio shelf and the idea was born. I had always loved the carousel. I ran the idea past my instructor and it was a go. After three months of research, three weeks of writing, a week of rewrites and 17 pages later, I learned so much about carousel construction, preservation and restoration that I have gained a new respect for the old carousels and the men who built them.

I am very happy that the Paragon Park Carousel has survived. Now several times a year I go down to Hull to walk Nantasket beach, play a few games of Skee-ball in the Arcade and of course, visit the carousel. I stand and listen to the music and watch the horses go around while fathers and grandfathers ride standing next to the horses of their young charges. Sometimes I drive out to the point by the old Coast Guard station and look out into the gut, remembering when I was a child without a care, waiting for my father and grandfather... thinking about Chicken in Biscuit crackers and sweet gherkin pickles.

Isn't it funny what one remembers from their childhood?

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