



“Carpe diem! Rejoice while you are alive; enjoy the day; live life to the fullest; make the most of what you have...”

-Horace, Ancient Roman Poet. 65 BC-8 BC



Wildwood Boardwalk Coasters

(L) The Sea Serpent on Morey's Surfside Pier

(C) The Flyer on the old Hunt's Pier

(R) The Great White on Morey's Adventure Pier

“THE SHOOBIE SHUFFLE” TALES FROM WILDWOOD FANATICS NEAR AND FAR. . .

Rob Ascough: An Oceanic Wonderland of Memories

By Al Alven

It was the Summer of 1987 and Rob Ascough was in his glory. At the time, the “Oceanic Wonderland” of Hunt’s Pier was still fully intact. The Golden Nugget Mine Ride, Jungleland, the Pirate Ship SKUA, the Wacky Shack... the list of awe-inspiring, one-of-a-kind attractions went on and on. What more could a nine-year-old kid on vacation in Wildwood possibly want?

“Maybe to not have to ride the Flyer, that’s about it,” he recalled with deadpan sincerity, referring to the iconic wooden roller coaster that sat for three decades at the foot of the northeast entrance to the pier. “It was my biggest fear back then and I wanted no parts of it. Adults screaming bloody murder, people getting sick on something that tosses you through the air and practically inside out?”

“Uh, no thanks. I had no interest in roller coasters, but my dad kept insisting that I give it a try.”

Ascough, now 31, of Wanaque, NJ, didn’t realize it at the time, but his first experience with the Flyer would have a profound impact on his life, serving as the catalyst for his greatest interest. It just wouldn’t happen right away.

“So, my dad gets me on this thing,” he continued, “and guess what - I hated it. Absolutely hated it. I decided then and there that my first ride on the Flyer would be my last. As strange as it sounds, that winter, I thought of ways I could avoid riding it the following year.”

But something totally unexpected happened in 1988. Ascough wound up giving the Flyer another try... and then another, and another, and another. To this day, he can’t reason why, but he fell in love with the ride

that second time around. And the spark that would ignite his passion for roller coasters first flickered.

“Maybe I just had to get that first ride out of the way to get over the fear. I don’t know, but I must have rode the Flyer 13 or 14 times the year after. At least a few times every night. It became my favorite ride just like that.

“The Flyer wasn’t the biggest or the fastest; it topped out at 36 feet high and the whole ride lasted about a minute. But, there was just something about it. Something about its layout and the way it grooved with the surroundings on Hunt’s Pier, with the Boardwalk, the beach, and the ocean as backdrops. It was just magical.”

Unbeknownst to Ascough at the time, however, the old girl was living on borrowed time.

“On our way down to Wildwood in 1989, all I could think about was the Flyer. I just couldn’t wait to get there and ride it. I remember my dad joking in the car about what I’d do if the Flyer suddenly disappeared. This was in the days before the Internet and instant information, so we couldn’t have know.

“When we arrived down and found that the Flyer was gone, I was devastated. Looking back, I’m very lucky that I got to enjoy it the year before, because otherwise it would have been too late. But, that was, pretty much, the beginning of the end for Hunt’s Pier as we knew it.”

In the years that followed, all of those classic custom rides would disappear, one by one. The pier itself changed hands multiple times and went through several different incarnations before ultimately being acquired by the Morey Organization. By that

point, all that was left was the Golden Nugget, which would sit dormant before finally being demolished earlier this year.

Ascough was one of an estimated 1,000 people (some put the figure as high as 2,000) who braved bone-chilling winds and temperatures in the low 20s to pay respects to the Nugget on January 31, as the Moreys held an elaborate “farewell” ceremony for the hybrid coaster/dark ride, perhaps the most unique attraction in the history of the Wildwoods.

“It was sad, like saying goodbye to an old friend,” said Ascough. “But it was also a wonderful tribute and a class move by the Moreys to do this. I wouldn’t have missed this for the world.

“So many of us grew up with the great custom rides of Hunt’s Pier, and the Nugget was always the centerpiece attraction. In a way, it’s fitting that it was the last of the rides to survive. It was a bittersweet day as it marked the end of an era, but with an eye toward the future.”

And the future certainly has amusement enthusiasts buzzing, with the Moreys proposing to build a mega-coaster that will travel from Surfside Pier to Hunt’s Pier, spanning the beach between. That the not-yet-named entity will be partially constructed over areas that once were occupied by the Flyer, the Nugget, and other classic Hunt’s attractions is not lost on Ascough.

“It’s going to be incredible. I can’t wait, and I have to say that it does take a bit of the sting out of losing the Nugget, just to know that the Moreys are looking to the future with such big aspirations. You can bet I’ll be first in line to ride it!”

Not long after his experiences on the Flyer during the late 80’s, a family friend surprised Ascough with a subscription to the American Coasters Enthusiasts (ACE) newsletter. Ascough gathered all of the coaster info he could and, in the years that followed, took the opportunity to visit as many amusement parks as possible.

“Once I got to the age where I was driving and could get out on my own, there was no stopping me,” he recalled. “I started visiting all of the parks within close distance, like Great Adventure, Hershey, and Knoebels, then continued to branch out, riding every coaster I could.”

Entering the 2009 season, Ascough calculated that he had ridden 276 coasters around the country. He presently serves as the President of the Wood Coaster Fan Club, a group he co-founded, and regularly publishes the “Timber Tales” newsletter.

“I’ve been all over the place and have been on some of the tallest, fastest, scariest coasters around. But it always comes back to Wildwood, back to Hunt’s Pier, and back to the Flyer for me. It may be gone, but I’ll never forget it.”

Al Alven is a lifelong Wildwoods visitor and enthusiast. He lives with his wife Angie and son Lucas (a sixth-generation Shoobie!) in Philadelphia, where he works as a freelance writer.

Attention all Shoobies: Are you a true Wildwoods fanatic? Do you have a story to tell or memories of your experiences on 5 Mile Beach that you’d like to share? If so, we’d love to feature you in a future edition of the “Shoobie Shuffle.” Please contact the author at alalven@aol.com.