Riding a Flying Comet

Boy felt all grown up until faced with Lincoln Park's colossus.

By Gene Barbero, Hampton, Virginia

"NO MORE KIDDY LAND for me, Ma. I'm 8 years old now."

It was the summer of 1950, and we were headed for the amusement rides and other joys of Lincoln Park in North Dartmouth, Massachusetts.

As we topped the hill at Route 6 and Reed Road, Ma laughed and said, "All right, no more Kiddy Land for you this year."

My excitement was building. I could see the round windows of the ballroom, and all of a sudden, there it was—the biggest Ferris wheel in the world. I hoped it wouldn't take my father an hour to park the car.

Finally, we were out. My sister and her friend went their own way, and Dad gave us money for tickets and headed for the pavilion for some clam cakes and beer.

Ma said I could go on the pony ride first, but we were standing in the line for the horse ride. Ma told me not to worry, that I was 8 now and I could handle it. I thought, Well, I guess if Cisco and Hoppy could ride a horse, so could I.

Until I was lifted onto the saddle, I didn't realize just how big a horse was. I spent the next 5 minutes trying not to look scared stiff!

When it was over, I thought, Good, now I can go on the train ride, one of my favorites.

But we were headed straight for—oh, no, it couldn't be—The Comet, which was the big roller coaster. I protested that I was only 8, but Ma said, "Don't worry. You can handle it."

My first thought was that my parents didn't want me around anymore, figuring I'd meet my demise on this ride.

Then I saw the sign, with the cut-out body of a boy, that read, "You must be this tall to go on this ride." Well, I knew I was safe then, but arms from behind picked me up so my feet weren't touching the ground and my head moved above the sign. I could not believe my mother would do this to me!

Before I could protest again, Ma had pushed me into the car, pulled down the bar to hold me in and told me to hold on. I thought, Of all the mothers in the world, I have to get one who likes roller coasters!

When we came to the sign at the crest of the first downhill run, all it said was "Last Chance." Before Ma could grab me, I slid down between the seat and the front of the car, closed my eyes as tight as I could and prayed.

It was like falling off the edge of a cliff straight down. Between the noise, the speed and the car shaking so much, I hoped I would never be this scared again. Compared to the first drop, the rest of the ride was much easier.

When the ride came to a stop and I tried to get out of the car, Ma pulled me back down and said that until I could sit up straight and look over the first drop, we were going to stay on the coaster.

It took me five more trips before I could do that. We rode a total of seven times, the last time because I wanted to! I was no longer afraid of the big roller coaster.

My sister and father couldn't believe that I had gone on The Comet,

but Ma and I knew better. And when I found out that I was the only one in my class to have ridden Lincoln Park's big coaster, I was sure I wasn't mad at Ma anymore.

Ma is gone now, and so are the Lincoln Park amusements, but I'll always remember my first ride on a high-speed Comet.

After Lincoln Park closed, December 3, 1987, the majority of rides were dismantled and sold off, the large Ferris wheel being moved to the New Bedford, Massachusetts waterfront.

Most of The Comet remains standing, although part of it collapsed in a 2005 snowstorm. The ride's cars were purchased by Little A-Merrick-A amusement park in Wisconsin with the hope that the cars will one day roll again on a copy of the magnificent coaster.