

# Six Flags with Grandma

*by Jason W. Hogue*

I was eleven years old in my fifth grade class daydreaming about tall roller coasters and the ones with loops.

“Jason. Jason!” Mrs. Martin shouted.

“Yes, Mrs. Martin?”

“It is not summer yet and I need you paying attention,” she said with a stern look.

I think she went on to discuss important things that we were supposed to learn, but I was gone again in a flash. You see, in the summer of 1983, my grandma decided to take all of her grandchildren on trips. There was Kyle, Kelli, and Kirk belonging to my dad’s brother, uncle Dowell, and there was Julie and me. Grandma decided that she would make two trips and each would last for 7 days. The oldest three, Kyle, Kelli, and Julie, would go to New York and Washington D.C., and the younger two, Kirk and I, would go to Six Flags over Georgia. She said we would go to other places of national importance, but all I heard was Six Flags. Since she announced the events I couldn’t concentrate on anything else.

The oldest three received the honor of traveling first, and that week waiting for them to return went by like slow motion. They brought back all kinds of souvenirs and gifts. My sister gave me some Aramis cologne from New York and a miniature version of a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier guard from Washington D.C. They had tons of pictures with stories to tell about each of them. We gathered in my grandma’s living room to hear their stories about the

# Six Flags with Grandma

*by Jason W. Hogue*

places they visited and the things they saw and did in New York and Washington D.C. A few days after they had returned we started preparing Grandma's deep maroon 1976 Oldsmobile Delta 88 Limited Edition for the second journey. The big boat of a car with its soft velour seats still had a new car smell, but was a different new car smell from my mother's 1976 Oldsmobile Delta 88 with vinyl seats. I liked Grandma's car much better.

My grandma, cousin Kirk, and I left Bryant, Arkansas early one morning headed to Georgia. I really didn't know what was in store for us, but I was so excited just to be on the way. Kirk and I played games like "I see, you see", "the license plate game", and "slug bug" to pass the time. We had small electronic games (mine was Donkey Kong) and cards to keep us occupied, as well. Grandma began to tell us that we were headed to Lookout Mountain and it had an incline railroad train that climbed the side of the mountain.

"A train that climbs mountains? Are you pulling our legs, Grandma?" I asked.

"No, it's for real. You will just have to wait and see for yourself," she said, "and we will stop by another mountain, too, Stone Mountain."

"Wow, mountains," we uttered as she continued.

She told us about a carving on the side of the mountain that depicts generals of the Confederate States or something like that. (Looking it up today on the internet I know it is of Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jefferson Davis.)

# Six Flags with Grandma

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The largest high relief sculpture in the world, the Confederate Memorial Carving, depicts three Confederate heroes of the Civil War, President Jefferson Davis and Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. The entire carved surface measures three-acres, larger than a football field and Mount Rushmore. The carving of the three men towers 400 feet above the ground, measures 90 by 190 feet, and is recessed 42 feet into the mountain. The deepest point of the carving is at Lee's elbow, which is 12 feet to the mountain's surface.<sup>1</sup>

We kept asking Grandma the number one question kids want to know on a trip, "Are we there yet?" We stopped at a hotel for the first leg of our journey and I knew then we were really going a far distance from home. I felt safe, though, with Grandma. The hotel had a pool and Kirk and I quickly ran to get our swim trunks on. There was a young girl about 16 or 17 that thought we were cute enough to teach us to dive into the water. I was a "slow learner" so that she would hold me at my waist to keep me from falling into the water until I was ready. I liked that part a lot, so actually, learning to dive from the side of a pool is still something I need to learn.

Grandma gave Kirk and I a small journal book and film for our cameras that she had purchased for us a few days earlier. As we went along I would write in my journal the things

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<sup>1</sup> Stone Mountain Park. Confederate Memorial Carving. 28 April, 2014.  
<<http://www.stonemountainpark.com/activities/history-nature/confederate-memorial-carving.aspx>>

# Six Flags with Grandma

*by Jason W. Hogue*

that I liked to see and do. The next morning we gathered our things and packed them back into the car to head for Stone Mountain. We were traveling down a road with large mountains covered in green pine trees when we saw a sign that read, "Second Largest Water Slide in the World!" Now how could we pass that up? We yelled, "Stop Grandma! Please! Please!"

She pulled in and said that we couldn't stay long because it wasn't in our itinerary. I wasn't sure what that meant, but I was glad she stopped. We ran like lightening to the top to enjoy the fun with the others on the slide. It seemed as if we made friends every stop of this journey. A family of five pulled in about the same time we did. The mother knitted and talked with Grandma under a small pavilion at the bottom of the hill while the dad and three kids joined us on the slide. The slide was one of the old kinds that were made from fiberglass and you had to use a pad or it would burn you. I fell off my pad a couple of times and flopped around like I was a hot potato trying not to touch the slide. It hurt with a stinging feeling that lasted all day.

The dad devised a plan to have one person go first and then a few seconds after, everyone else as a group would go. The large group would push the water faster, higher, and make it just that much more fun for the rider in front. Well, that is what we all thought until I was the rider in front. It was my turn to be out front and I was the smallest of all the people there at the time. As I started down the slide I could feel the water pushing harder and faster.

# Six Flags with Grandma

*by Jason W. Hogue*

The first corner approached and I got scared when I was pushed up the wall and even onto the ceiling part of the corner. I fell from the top down to the slide and quickly got the pad back under me just in time for the next corner. At this point I knew I was going to die if I didn't keep my head on straight. (Okay now, remember I was just 11 years old thinking this, so it ain't good folks.) I made it past the second corner and was facing the biggest corner yet. I prepared myself the best I could and got angry at the slide. "I will kick your butt!" I proclaimed, holding the front of the pad with a death grip and standing in a crouched position. I rode that pad into the corner and went completely to the top of the canopy covering the corner. I rounded and turned to see the canopy running out and the ground covered with large rocks. I kicked off the top and landed on my back where no water was at all. My back was burnt as if a large rope had just whipped across it.

After that experience I was ready to leave the water park. Kirk and I both were ready because we had been sliding down and then running back to the top to do it again for 4 hours. We said goodbye to the family and jumped in the car to hit the road.

# Six Flags with Grandma

*by Jason W. Hogue*

When we finally arrived at Stone Mountain and I was in awe. I wrote in my journal, “Beautiful, just beautiful!” I just couldn’t imagine someone hanging from ropes and carving all that on the side of a mountain.



**The Confederate Memorial Carving at Stone Mountain Park**

(Stone Mountain Park. Confederate Memorial Carving. 3 May, 2014.

<<http://www.stonemountainpark.com/activities/history-nature/confederate-memorial-carving.aspx>>)

We took lots of pictures of the mountain and the nature all around it. We walked all over the park as Grandma read the markers and information signs and we listened intently.

“Here, you read this one, Kirk,” Grandma pointed.

Kirk read a sign about the native flowers that were planted around the bottom of the mountain in the park.

“Now it is your turn, Jason,” Grandma pointed to the next sign.

# Six Flags with Grandma

*by Jason W. Hogue*

I read a sign about the animals that live in the park and around the lake, Stone Mountain Lake. To this day, I like to stop at information centers to read about interesting landmarks when I am on journeys.

Grandma read the signs about things that had happened in the past because they were much bigger and longer. Kirk and I were just staring at the mountain with the three men on horseback while she told us the story from the sign. After we walked around the park for a while she told us we were going on a train ride.

“Does it climb the mountain?” I asked excitedly.

“No, this one stays on flat ground”, she said.

The train went all the way around the mountain and through woods most of the time. We saw an old covered bridge like the ones in movies and PBS specials. An old mill with a large wheel that turned grinding stones together was powered by the creek that flowed under the bridge. We saw a quarry where the mining company took out enough granite that you could make a foot-wide path that would stretch from the North Pole to the South Pole. We pulled back into the train station and went into the education center. There were all kinds of neat war items in there and we had fun looking it all over. I was especially interested in the guns and knives. There were pistols, rifles, and small canyons with the bullets they fired displayed in front of each of them. We read more about the battles and the people who fought in them.

# Six Flags with Grandma

by Jason W. Hogue

These days there are more attractions and activities than when we visited. They have a cable car and a hiking trail that goes through the tree tops.<sup>2</sup>

We left Stone Mountain to head up the road for another hotel. Even though we were both wrinkled from the water slide, Kirk and I ran to get our swim trunks on. After swimming we both spend time writing in our journal about the fun we had that day. The next morning we got ready to head for Lookout Mountain where the Incline Railroad, Rock City, and Ruby Falls were waiting for us. We went through Ruby Falls on a small train like the one at the Little Rock Zoo and they had little figures like the Oompa Loompas from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* arranged into a village with small groups doing different things. I really liked the little village and the figures that moved like they were alive.

(I looked the place up today and they have removed all the Oompa Loompas, I guess, because I didn't see them on the website at all. In fact, I don't think there is a train that runs through



**“Ruby Falls is named one of the Ten Most Incredible Cave Waterfalls on Earth.”**

([Lookout Mountain](http://www.lookoutmountain.com/ruby-falls). 3 May, 2014.  
<<http://www.lookoutmountain.com/ruby-falls>>)

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<sup>2</sup> [Stone Mountain Park](http://www.stonemountainpark.com/). 28 April, 2014. <<http://www.stonemountainpark.com/>>



# Six Flags with Grandma

*by Jason W. Hogue*

Ruby Falls, so I may be remembering two places instead of one.) I remember the falls with the lights shining up through the water from behind. The colors were so beautiful.

The train ride up the side of the mountain was cool—and how many people can say they have done such a thing? Well, I have! The train was tilted as if you were standing on the side of a hill and leaning in toward the hill to keep your balance. Kirk and I thought a train ride up a mountain would be like a ride at an amusement park, but it wasn't. Instead it was just slow and steady. It was still fun to look out the windows and see all the things you could see. You could see for miles and



**Incline Railway at Lookout Mountain**

(Lookout Mountain. 3 May, 2014.

<<http://www.lookoutmountain.com/incline-railway>>)

miles the rolling mountains tops and valleys with buildings and homes that seem to never end. The roof of the train was made of glass so you could see more of the things around you. From Rock City we saw even further using the telescopes to zoom in on the buildings and people below. I looked through the woods to see if I could see a bear because dad said there would be bears where I was going. I didn't see any bears, but I did see some horses and cows in a field.

We stayed in another hotel with a pool. Like all the other stops, there were other kids swimming in the pool and this time, two boys around our age. We played water volleyball and

# Six Flags with Grandma

*by Jason W. Hogue*

“keep away” until their parents said it was time for them to leave. We were having the time of our lives. After they left we returned to the room with Grandma who had been watching us play this whole time. She told us we needed to get a good night’s rest so we would be able to ride all the rides tomorrow.

When we woke up the next morning full of energy and excitement Grandma said we needed to get breakfast first and then we would go to Six Flags. I remember eating a big omelet and a side of biscuit and gravy at an old place that reminded me of some building in Dog Patch USA. The food was good, as far as I can remember, and after finishing we were ready to go.

We got to the entrance of Six Flags and didn’t have to wait long before we were inside. We rode the lazy river, the log ride, the train that went around the park, small roller coasters and then we got to the big roller coaster. It was the wooden one named, Georgia Cyclone. I had been reading that it was over 95 feet tall at the drop and reached speeds of up to 50 miles per hour. The sign there read, “You must be at least this tall to ride this ride.” It was on a figure of a bear dressed up and his finger was pointed over to the side. I ran up and the man at the entrance yelled, “Too short, shorty. Maybe next year!”

# Six Flags with Grandma

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I wished I was big then, just to punch him in the nose. Grandma knew I was crushed because I had talked about riding that ride for days. “It’s the tallest roller coaster in the USA, Grandma!” the brochure on Six Flags over Georgia had said so.

Grandma and I sat down at a park bench as Kirk rode the ride that I had been waiting all week to enjoy because he was tall enough. We watched the people getting off and a couple had to run over to the trash can and throw up their food. That was pretty cool to me. Grandma tried to make me feel better by telling me about other things that we were going to be doing later and then a man rolled a cart by that said “Yard Dogs.” The man asked if we wanted a yard dog. It was a 3-foot-long hot dog, so naturally I answered, “Yes! With cheese and chili and onions, don’t forget the onions!”

Grandma and I shared the hot dog and Kirk got a regular size hot dog by the time the ride was over, which made me feel even better. We continued around the park to the soda stand, the candy store, and the place that sold funnel cakes.

Of course, with my luck I can’t be on a journey and not get hurt, so I was running to the next ride with my hand sliding along on the rail when I pushed my thumb under to catch one of the upright poles, then “SNAP!” I fell to the ground holding my hand and I knew the sound came from my hand. Grandma took me to the safety station and the nurse there said it looked like I broke my thumb. She put my hand inside an ice chest that had notches on the top edge of

# Six Flags with Grandma

*by Jason W. Hogue*

the lid to allow room for my arm. After a few minutes my hand hurt from the cold ice and I wanted to remove it, but the nurse said I needed to leave it in there longer. I told Grandma my hand felt better, so when the nurse left the room we left, too. When we made it back to the hotel we were whooped from spending all day in the park riding rides and eating food.

The ride back home was long, but fun because I was with my grandma. I miss her very much, but from all the wonderful memories she gave us and the journal she gave me to write them in, I still have her with me.