

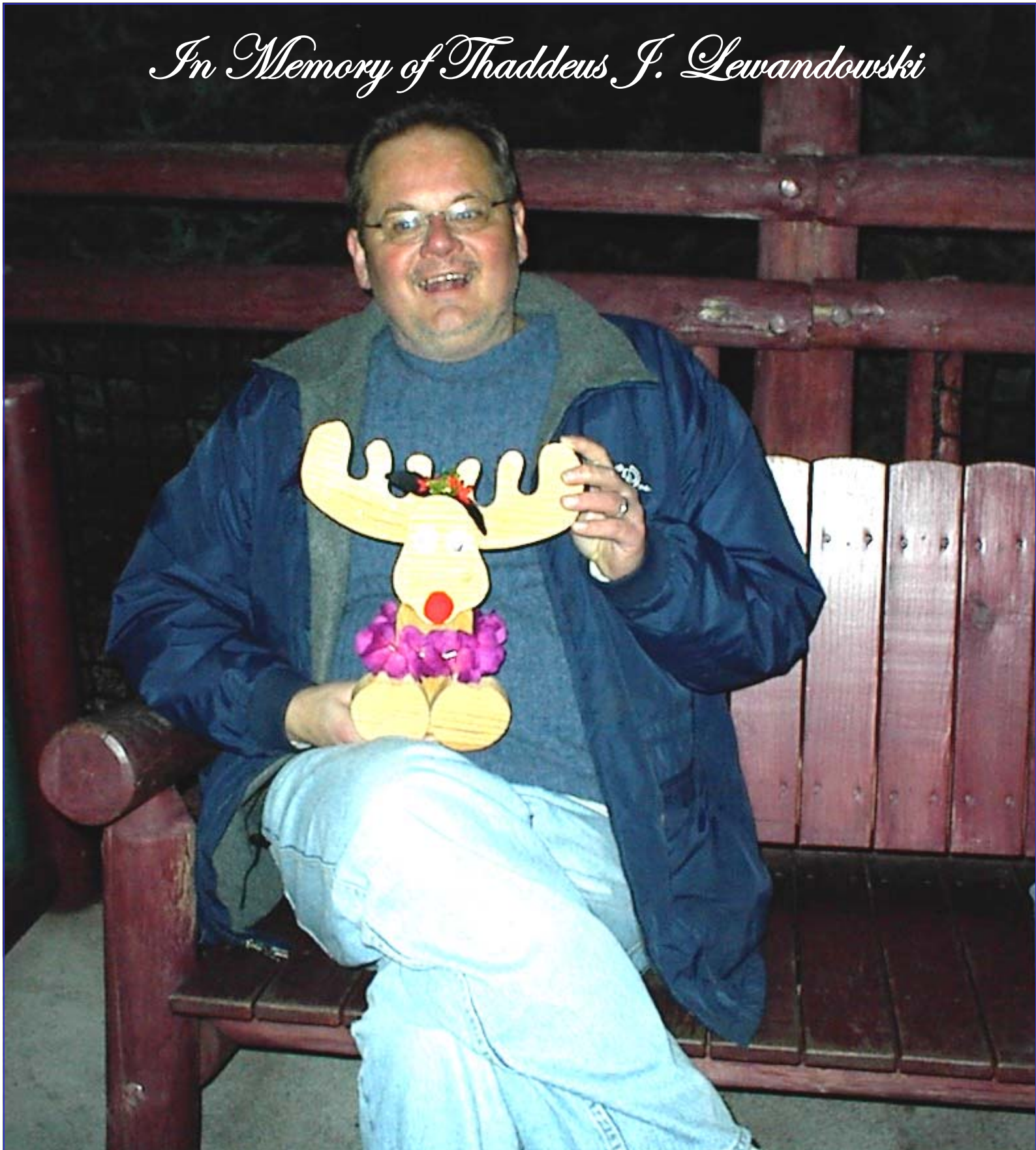
# Gravity Gazette

Western New York  
Coaster Club

Special Edition

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*In Memory of Thaddeus J. Lewandowski*

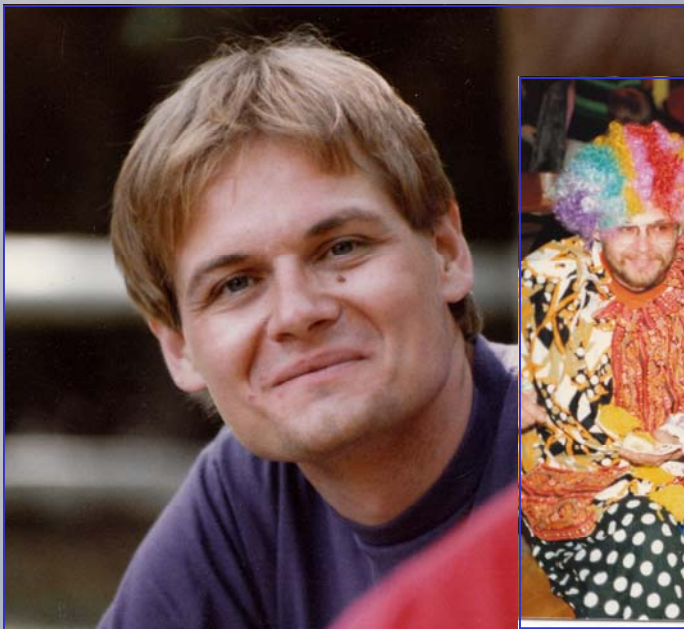




I have a very clear memory of when I first met Thad and Rich over 25 years ago. I sat with them at a meeting of WNYCC. By the end of the afternoon Betty Puffer, Jim Mazur and I had arranged to go on a coaster trip with them. That weekend fell through, but it was typical of Thad's ability to make lifelong friends in just a moment. I have travelled with them more times than I can count, and spent many times just hanging out in Erie with them. When I was working second shift I used to get done at 11:00 pm and drive to Erie. We'd have something to eat then drive all night to Kings Island and spend the day. Ahhh to be young again. There was also a very memorable trip to Times Square for New Year's Eve. (Yes Thad, we really would have walked back up 27 flights of stairs to get you if it had been a real fire :- ) ) And just like many of you, the evenings on the porch at Conneaut after the Blue Streak events will be times that I'll cherish for the rest of my life.

My life has been immeasurably richer for having known Thad. He embraced life and lived it to it's fullest

Jill.



Top Left: Thad, Betty Puffer and I think the girl is one of Gary Tatu's kids, but not sure. Idlewild

Top Right: Jeff Martin, Thad, Rich Waldemeer

Center Left: Thad Waldemeer

Center Right: Thad and Reed Elliott Knoebel's Phunphest

Bottom Left: Betty Puffer, Thad, Reed Elliott, Jill Thomson, Rich Koppelman, Mike Saunders Conneaut Lake. We did 5 parks for Coasterfest that year with an optional trip to 2 more. These were the 7 (#7 was taking the picture, I can't remember who that was) crazy people who actually did all 7 in 3 days.

Photos courtesy of Jill Thomson

Side note: pictures from this page are all taken between 1983 & 1989 per Jill



Thad. Always glad to see Thad. It might have been months or, lately, it might have been a year since we last saw each other, but it was always a pleasure to greet and talk with Thad. The last time I saw Thad was at Coasterfest™ last year. Yvonne and I ran into Thad sitting on a park bench just outside the Ravine Flyer entrance at Waldameer. It had been a while since we had seen Thad, too long. We had a nice visit catching up, Thad was always so easy to talk to on a variety of topics. At the time we had no idea of what lay ahead for Thad, so the conversation was upbeat. At the time it seemed like we had a nice long conversation that day. In retrospect I wish it had been longer. Our time that day, and our time with Thad, was too short. I spent some time looking back for photos for this issue of the Gravity Gazette. I specifically was looking for the photo of Thad on the park bench that day. I can see him clearly in my mind, sitting in the sun, chatting with passing friends while the new Ravine Flyer was roaring by in the background. Alas, to my dismay, the photo that is so clear in my mind was never taken that day. I don't have the photo, but I do have the memory. I have many memories.

Looking back through old issues of the Gravity Gazette documents some of Thad's involvement in WNYCC. In the summer of 1983, the second year of the Club, there in the fall membership listing, Thaddeus J. Lewandowski was listed for the first time as a member. Thad joined at the same time as Rich and, over the years, shared several of the same service positions with Rich. Thad was a member of the first Planning Committee in 1985 after the new Club constitution was approved. He continued to serve on the Planning Committee through 2000, at least 15 years of helping to plan events and lead the Club. He served with Rich as co-editor of the Gravity Gazette in 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988. He served, again with Rich, as co-Membership Director in 1991, 1992 and 1993. Then Thad served as Interclub Liaison in 1998, 1999 and 2000. That is a long stretch to be active in the Club in a variety of service positions. I know that he, along with Rich, planned the 1997 Coasterfest™ at Holiday World and Kentucky Kingdom, which was the furthest ever to that point from western New York. How many other events he was involved in over the years is, to me, countless.



Thad in the back row with everyone else just getting off the Seabreeze Jack Rabbit after Bob & Yvonne's first ride at their wedding reception. Except for Yvonne's maid of honor and brother, everyone else are WNYCC members. How many members can you name? Photo from Wheeler collection.

To me, one event that Thad helped set up that sticks in my mind was a group outing to Kings Island in April of 1986. That was the first time I met Thad. It was the first coaster trip I took with WNYCC. It was the first trip with my new girl friend Yvonne Forsythe. We got engaged after driving home from that event. I'm not saying that Thad is responsible for Yvonne and I getting married, but the great time we had at Kings Island and Americana didn't hurt. We were honored to have Thad and Rich at our wedding six months later.

There were many other times where we saw Thad over the years. Riding the log flume together at Americana (it's no joke, we did get soaked), the New Years Eve party at Jill Thomson's house, staying overnight with him and Rich as we were passing through Erie on a coaster trip, the first Phall Phunfest at Knoebels, at Cedar Point for WNYCC's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, running into him unexpectedly at the grand opening of Fiesta Texas, the Club meeting he and Rich hosted at their house, all those monthly Club meetings in Batavia, Thad's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party, and many many good times sitting on the porch at the Hotel Conneaut. So many good times, too many to list.

I went back through my photo albums looking for pictures of Thad. That brought back many memories of him, all good. I hope that some of those photos can be used for this issue. The one thing that I noticed was that in many of the group photos, there Thad was close to the center of the group. That was appropriate. He was often the center. It seemed like Thad knew everyone and everyone knew Thad. Many of the friendships formed were when two of Thad's friends met each other through Thad. Many of the Club members came to WNYCC first as friends of Thad and Rich. That impact doesn't show in the listing of service positions held, but that was a huge impact on the Club.

I also found that I didn't have nearly enough photos of all the good times over the years that I remembered with Thad. I'm sure if you knew Thad you have good memories too. And if you don't....well the punch line to that joke is one Thad would love, but I think I'll edit it out myself. But I can hear Thad saying it anyway. Thanks for all the laughter over the years Thad. It was a privilege and delight to have known you.

Bob Wheeler



### In Memory of my Dear Friend

It was wonderful having Thad for a friend, a friend who accepted you just the way you were. You were always welcome to visit at Thad and Rich's home and they would gladly share what they had with you. Thad was a calming influence and helped me "adjust" my perceptions. He was remarkably positive, even when his leg was amputated and he had the transplants. He was funny, and fun to be with too. I am so blessed that he was my friend. I will miss him and cherish the priceless memories I have. Love, Betty

Top Left: Mike Saunders and Thad in the front of the Comet. Ann Wilke and Sandy Love are in the back seat and Joe Belanger and Mike Horwood are taking pictures. Crystal Beach

Top Right: Thad at Conneaut Lake

Middle: Mike Saunders, Thad Not sure where this was taken

Bottom: Betty Puffer, Rich Koppleman, Bill Puffer, Thad, Paul Greenwald at Bob and Yvonne Wheelers wedding reception at Seabreeze.

Photos courtesy of Jill Thomson

Side note: pictures from this page are all taken between 1983 & 1989 per Jill





It's as though Thad always had more to say when he ended a conversation with "...And that."

Jerry and I were amazed at the first time we set foot in Rich and Thad's house many years ago. It was filled with more coaster memorabilia than anything we had ever seen - almost like walking into a mini roller coaster museum with a fine display of shot glasses, mugs, photos, posters, pennants, and everything imaginable.

Jerry recalls lots of park bench conversations with Thad during ERTs when they were both taking a break from riding. We recall lots of different subject matters, from light-hearted to deep thoughts on life. The ones I remember most were of people we've lost, including Cheryl Snyder and our daughter Julie Rae. I always walked away feeling so much better.

I think one of the very best highlights for Thad was when Ravine Flyer II finally opened and became a reality. Between Waldameer's Opening Day and Coasterfest, it was something we all had shared and anticipated for years and years. My grandfather had ridden the original Ravine Flyer and Waldameer was my home park when I lived in Erie as a child. During Coasterfest, one of the *The Erie-Times News* reporters had Thad, Rich and myself do an audio interview for their website. What fun that was, describing our thoughts of the new ride. When it was edited, Thad's comments were overwhelming kept in more than Rich's and mine. Thad always thought out things so well before commenting!

I remember lots of events with MACC, including the King's Dominion and Busch Gardens events. But especially the Streak Outs held at Conneaut. There was laughter that whole weekend, each and every year. The Blue Streak gave all of us so much to look forward to for the next year - we could never get enough of our plentiful ERT. And the fun on the Hotel Conneaut veranda. If you had never experienced even one MACC event there, you missed out on so much. More interesting conversations with Rich, Thad and the gang into the wee hours. And the snacks and beer ran nonstop. Though Thad had slowed down on his events the past several years, he never, ever missed those fun weekends in late August.



The second last time I saw Thad was at the GOCC/ACE event at Waldameer in August. He thoroughly enjoyed the peanut butter cookies I shared, and was happy to take the leftovers! That was also the last time we had another great conversation about life. It was sadly the last time I gave Thad one of my mini shoulder massages, which he always looked forward to.

Platform on Blue Streak, Streak Out August 2004, from left Thad Lewandowski, Debbie Grudzien, Nancy Carrigan, Bob & Yvonne Wheeler picture from Deb Grudzien

Jerry and I stopped to see Thad and Rich in mid-December when we were in Erie for a wedding. Thad still had his usual humor and stories, keeping up with our conversations as best he could. He even took the time to tell us about the Mansion where the wedding was being held that evening. We shared our last long hugs and said our goodbyes.

Thad's recent conversation to Judaism might have had some people perplexed. We know Thad was searching for something, and he finally found it. Talking with the Rabbi's wife at Thad's Memorial Service, we learned so much more about how much he helped the Temple grow. His teaching to both young and old will leave a void. The children loved listening to his stories about roller coasters and even wanted to learn about his prosthesis.

Those memories will live on with all that knew Thad.

We miss you already, dear friend. But we know you'd finished your work here on earth, sharing your warmth, humor and inspiring stories of achievement. Like many who have left us, we've thoroughly enjoyed riding with you. And that.

- Nancy and Jerry Carrigan

Almost all my memories of Thad are actually Rich and Thad. They have both been very generous to me over the years. One trip when Jill Thomson and I went to Waldameer with Rich and Thad, I forgot my money in the trunk of their car. We were probably only fifty feet away from the car, but they wouldn't go back and insisted on paying. And if you were traveling nearby and needed a place to stay, Rich and Thad were always willing to host overnight guests.



Thad front and center New Year's Eve 1986 at Jill Thomson's, Except for Jill's brother and his wife in the back, everyone else a WNYCC member. Interesting that we all look the same today (at least in our own minds). Photo Yvonne Wheeler

One of the best stories with Rich and Thad is The Trip to Riverside! Back in, maybe, 1985, Rich and Thad rented a station wagon and Jill Thomson, Ed Clifton, Judy Schmucker and I left *really early* from Rochester on a Saturday, drove to Riverside Park in Agawam, Massachusetts, enjoyed a very full day at the Park, and drove back *really late* to Rochester. My husband, Bob, remembers Rich sound asleep in the very back seat of the station wagon and that Thad lost his pillow at a rest area. (This all took place before I met Bob, but he's heard me tell the story so many times he thinks he actually was there!) Are you wondering why we drove over to Riverside and back to Rochester in the same day? The reason was that we had to be back on Sunday in time for a WNYCC meeting in Batavia!

Of course, some of my favorite memories are of Rich and Thad at Conneaut. Blue

Streak Bash/Streak Out was the best event every year. The two greatest rides at Conneaut are the Blue Streak and the front porch of the Hotel Conneaut. Rich and Thad would claim a corner of the porch in the morning and, one person or two at a time, ending up with around twenty people, would pull over a chair to join in the conversation and laughter until late into the night. And it didn't matter what you had in your cooler, Rich and Thad always wanted others to try the unusual microbrews that they had in their cooler.

I've made a lot of friends through WNYCC, and I'm very fortunate that one of them was Thad.

Yvonne Wheeler



Veranda at  
Conneaut Lake  
August 2002



Top left: Thad, Judy Schmucker is behind him, Jeff Martin, Jill Thomson, Bill Winston is standing behind me, Betty Puffer. Go-karts at the CNE. By the way, Bill was nearly blind, but he did ok on the go-karts courtesy of Jill Thomson

Top right: Let's party like it's 1987! New years eve 1986 at Jill Thomson's.

Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler

Middle left: Thad and Jill Thomson get ready for the wet t-shirt contest, or maybe they just got off the flume at Americana during the 1987 ACE Spring Conference. Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler.

Middle right: Mid day of the 3rd day and 4th park of Coasterfest 1986. Thad catches a quick nap in the parking lot at Canada's Wonderland. We were all younger, but still needed some sleep. Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler

Bottom: Bill Kae and Steve Thompson, Rich Koppleman, and Paula Werne at Stark Raven Mad 2000. Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler



When James decided to do this tribute issue, James and I thought there would be so much to publish there would be no room. What we did not think of is that Thaddeus Lewandowski has made such an impression on people; it was difficult for many of them to write something. We received e-mails of apology that they couldn't put their feelings in words. There was even an e-mail from someone who never met Thad, but had read articles in this publication which Thad wrote and this person felt as if he knew Thad.

I met Thad at the 1997 Coasterfest™ at Holiday World and Kentucky Kingdom. The funny thing is we never introduced each other (guess all you really need to do is read name badges), just seemed like we knew each other forever. We talked a bit and little did I know that this meeting would change my entire life. That day, Mr. Lewandowski asked me if I knew what WNYCC was all about. I didn't have an answer for his query.

Unbeknown to me, shortly after that, Thad started to slowly focus his energies in another direction and away from WNYCC.

I would run into Thad from time to time, we would talk a little here and there. The next time I would meet Thad was at Conneaut Lake, the Streak Out event. I was going through bad times and somehow I think he knew just what was going on. We started to talk and realized we were a lot alike. The more we talked the deeper the conversations got. Thad kept telling me I needed to get to know Rich; well I did and let me say no two better friends could any one have.

Thad and Rich let me tag along with them. Wow, did I meet people. We joked and had great times. Never in my wildest dreams would I ever believe I would be going across the country riding roller coasters. They taught me the tricks of the trade.

During those times, the seed was being planted for me to grow into WNYCC right where Thad and Rich left off. I had no clue, but in retrospect I think he planned the whole thing. Our talks would be long and nothing was off limits. They got me through the rough times and I had a few. Thad gave me this passage from the Old Testament "Break with the past to reinvent yourself as the person you've always wanted to be." Right then I knew I wanted to be more involved with WNYCC. Thad got my bug in about the WNYCC website, so I volunteered as webmaster. (That's not what he called me). Although neither one of them was currently involved with WNYCC, they both made sure I was accepting positions for the right reasons, especially when I volunteered for Treasurer.

For the next several years, our friendship grew. Thad focused his efforts in his faith. He became a teacher in the Temple which he was a member. Whenever he spoke of the teaching and the Temple there was a special joy you could see and feel. He would burst out in song at a moment's notice not for any apparent reason, just because he was happy.

When I saw Thad at last year's Coasterfest™ I knew something was wrong. He seemed distant,



Closing of Schwabingchen 10/2002 from left, Howard Gillooly, Rich Koppelman, Debbie Grudzien, and Thad Lewandowski

but we found out later why. I was able to see him one last time in December. He looked weary from the treatments, tired and hurting. I was able to tell him what he did for me, how he changed my life, how he will be with me in my heart, and thanked him for all he had done. And in his humble words he told me he had no clue how many people's lives he touched. Well, Mr. Lewandowski, you surely touched mine and numerous others.

I said a last goodbye because I knew in my heart this would be the last time I would see him on this earth. I treasure that last time with him and all the fantastic memories I have of him. I know he is with me and seeing these pictures makes me think of those great times. It's been only 11 short years of friendship. In that 11 years, we managed to pack in many wishes fulfilled, dreams, laughter, and words of wisdom.

So, in conclusion, what is WNYCC about? In Thad's words, "It's not about the coasters." I am so glad my friend taught me just what WNYCC is about.

Take care my dear friend until we meet again. Shalom.

Debbie Grudzien



Thad seeing the fortune teller at Cedar Point Halloween-ends 10/02





Top left: Thad in group shot 1986 Coasterfest Crystal Beach. How many people do you recognize/remember?

Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler

Top right: Rick & Thad in back seat of Blue Streak Conneaut Lake, Streak Out 2006 photo Debbie Grudzien

Center: Thad and Nancy in deep discussion. Thad and Rich host the club meeting at their house in Feb 2000. Grainy photo from a low res digital photo, sorry. Digital cameras are so much better now. Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler

Bottom: Thad and Joann party down at the 1998 club Christmas party at Harvest House. Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler



Right: Thad, Rich and others riding the new Silver Streak during the grand opening in 1999. Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler

Middle Left: Thad remarks that he had no idea that Phunfest 1990 was a costumed event. Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler

Middle Right: Danny Biggerstaff, Steve Thompson, Rich Koppelman, and Thad Lewandowski in front of Apollo's Chariot in 2002

Bottom: Part of the WNYCC group at the 1992 event at Dutch Wonderland. Rich and Thad center back row. Photo Wheeler collection





Top: WNYCC celebrates 10th anniversary at Cedar Point. Front row: Howard & Yvonne. Back row: Reed, Jill, Thad, Bob & Rich. Thad in the center of the group, as usual. Photo Wheeler collection



Above: Rich & Thad front seat 1999 Silver Streak opening. Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler



Left: Thad presents MACC plaque to Holiday World in 1998. Rich and Steve (mostly cut off) look on. Being active in several clubs made Thad an ideal Inter-club Liaison. Photo Bob Wheeler



# In Memory of Thaddeus Lewandowski



Top Left: Thad and James Grudzien in back seat of Blue Streak during Streak Out 8/2002 photo Deb Grudzien

Top Right: Thad with Paula Werne at Holiday World for Stark Raven Mad 2000. Photo Bob & Yvonne Wheeler

Center: Veranda at Conneaut Lake photo from Deb Grudzien

Bottom Left: Thad in parking lot at Breakers photo from Debbie Grudzien

Bottom Right: Veranda pose Thad with Chris photo from Debbie Grudzien

