[This transcript has been lightly edited for flow and sentence structure]

Lizzie: Hello, hello everyone welcome to Once Upon A coaster, the podcast that dives deep into those old forgotten coasters that we all love and secretly adore. My name is Lizzie and I am your podcast host for this episode and we are so excited to finally be coming to you live from wherever you happen to be! This podcast has been such a long time in the making, probably as long as my Roller Coaster Tycoon one mile an hour coaster has been driving along the track slowly torturing its riders. But after a lot of work we are finally publishing everything so that you have the chance to come along with us on a wonderful journey through these old coasters that maybe we deserve to give a little more love to.

So, let me just break this down for you. This is our first podcast and we are not podcasters and we're kind of learning as we go so bear with us over these first couple episodes. We are definitely learning the ropes still and we hope to improve with time but we hope in the beginning if things are a little below par, for your podcast standards, that the content at least will keep you interested as we work to improve. And as we work to improve we would love your feedback. Constructive criticism is always wonderful when you're learning stuff like this. So please drop us a line if you have any comments that you feel will help to improve the show overall.

Our first season is going to hopefully drop one week at a time every Friday so that you can have a chance to enjoy it over the weekend. I say hopefully because you know how life gets. I mean, you know, just last week my dishwasher started leaking so assuming I have no more leaking dishwashers and that the world is still revolving as it really should these episodes will be coming to you six weeks in a row every Friday.

We have our whole first season already divided out into different coasters we want to tackle. We are still getting stuff together for Season 2 and beyond. So if you have a really great idea for an old coaster that you just think needs a little love from our show, drop us a line and let us know.

We are definitely interested in learning more about coasters in parts of the world that we might not have been to. We have gone to a lot of the United States and Canada visiting lots of theme parks over our lifetimes but the rest of the world has definitely not been available for us to visit so freely. So, drop us a line and give us some suggestions. We are all ears on how to make this podcast even better going forward.

That being said, each episode we'd really like to just focus on one coaster, give you guys our opinions on the coaster- the good, the bad, the funny, the ugly- and talk about the history of the ride, where it started, what made it so special, and what happened to it. Some of these rides, I'm happy to report, are still standing, still operating, still accepting visitors for thrills. But some of them unfortunately have been torn down. So we'll kind of look at both and see kind of maybe what happened that might have caused a ride to close and be torn down. Hopefully not too many of those cause, you know, they're not as much fun. But we hope that this podcast really inspires you to travel when it's safe to travel, because we're filming this during a pandemic, but also just to give a little more appreciation to these old girls. They are wonderful and they're

beautiful in their own way but maybe they don’t have the best stats but still deserve all the attention we should give them.

Let’s just get into this then. In our first episode, I'd like to let you guys know that we will be spending the episode talking about the oldest operating coaster still in existence, Leap the Dips at Lakemont Park in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

Oh my gosh, Lakemont Park. We kind of chose this coaster for our first episode for a couple of reasons. First, probably the biggest reason is that it is still the oldest operating roller coaster in the country. That's not a small feat in today's world, but also because I grew up in central Pennsylvania. And so Lakemont Park is kind of familiar to me. I didn't live super close to it, but I've visited there, and so I have a pretty good idea about the park, the ride, the community it's located in. And I *adore* Leap the Dips! But it’s also one of the craziest coasters I’ve ever been on. Lakemont Park itself doesn't really help because that park is a mess of a park.

I need to find a rich person who would like to just give me money because I have some really good ideas. I mean, I think I have some good ideas on how we could improve the park but I need some money. My cash flow is not enough to operate an amusement park. No seriously though, what is like the bottom threshold for owning an amusement park? In today's day I'm sure it's way more than any one person would ever put up because you have companies like Comcast who own Universal. Or is it NBC that owns Comcast? No, I think Comcast owns NBC and they also own Universal. So, I know that the buy in for an entire Amusement Park can't be big, but also, now I want to know. Because maybe we could start a GoFundMe? I don’t know. A GoFundMe to buy like Lakemont Park might actually find some success, because the problem with Lakemont Park is the locals have such a soft spot for it but there are too few locals.

Lakemont Park is located off I-99 in Altoona, Pennsylvania. And if you've never heard about Altoona, it's okay, most people haven't. Altoona is about two hours east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and a half hour south of State College, Pennsylvania and State College is where Penn State University is located. So that’s kind of about it. You have your people from like Frederick, Maryland who might drive in but they’re probably not driving into Altoona just to see Leap the Dips.

And this is one of the struggles like Lakemont Park kind of comes up against is that it’s not located in a great place to really draw people in. But also, we have to give props. Lakemont Park is one of the oldest operating parks in existence and it opened in the late 1800’s. And so maybe at the time it had a lot more people to draw from because it wasn’t expecting to be anything more than a trolley park. But, you know, times change.

If you’ve never been into Western Pennsylvania, Western Pennsylvania is a steel area so when the steel industry died a lot of business went with it. And some places are recovering, but some places are still just hurting for people and money and jobs. So Lakemont Park, while a mess, it's partially due to the fact that times change and the park couldn't really move to a different location.

But that being said, this isn't about Lakemont Park. I mean it kind of is but not really. It will be a podcast about Lakemont Park when we can buy it, how about that? I will turn this into a stan podcast of just Lakemont Park, cause it's beautiful, it's a really nice location. There's a baseball stadium right next to it. Right off the highway. There's a Sheetz there. If you don't know what Sheetz is you're obviously not from the Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland area and that's okay. The Sheetz around here are pretty, they're pretty good. So it's a great place for a park. It just needs some life. It needs some fresh blood injected into it.

But anyway, Leap the Dips! [chuckles] I always like to look at stats when I'm kind of, I don't want to say studying a coaster, but really looking at a coaster for the first time because it kind of gives you an idea of what to expect, you know. When you first pull up stats on something like Millenium Force and you see that it's going over 200 feet you're like "Oh, strap in. This is going to be a ride."

But I'm almost embarrassed to tell you guys the stats on Leap the Dips because they sound horrendous. I almost want to keep saying, keep reminding you, this is the oldest coaster in existence because I feel like I need to pep talk Leap the Dips up to you and if you've been there you would probably agree with me it is such an underwhelming coaster. You show up, you go through the gates, you walk up to the coaster. And my first thought was "That's it? This is it? This what we drove here for? Okay," because the highest point on this coaster, it tops out at a whopping 41 feet.

And I was thinking about this, and I own a home and it's one of those old homes that needs a lot of work, and it's built into the side of a hill and it has three full floors- two main floors and an attic. But the basement is exposed on one side of our house because it's built into a hill. And I was thinking, if each of the floors of my home were ten feet, that means I could climb onto my roof and I would be as tall as the tallest point on Leap the Dips. And when I stand outside and I look at my house I'm like "that's not that tall." And yet somehow this is the top hill on this roller coaster. And it gets worse. I think 41 feet is, well, that's not impressive. And then I looked up the tallest drop and oh my god. The tallest drop on this ride is nine feet. And I don't know why but I just broke into laughter when I read that because again nine feet, I could jump that. I could jump that jump. Jump that no problem. And somehow that is the tallest drop on this ride. But again, just kind of keep pushing this in there: this is the roller coaster that is the oldest operating coaster in the world. I just need to keep telling myself that because then it makes us feel a little better.

So, Leap the Dips, 41 feet tall. Top drop- nine feet. And the top speed is a whopping 10 miles an hour. And I don't even know what to compare that to. I think Michael Scott ran that in a faster time in that episode of *The Office* when they put the speed gun outside the office. So, this isn't moving fast, it's not going real high, the ride duration is exactly one minute. It's a figure eight track so you're going up that hill, and you're kind of slowly just weaving back and forth back to the station.

But again, I say it's the oldest coaster still operating in existence. I guess that counts for something. The coaster was built in 1902, by the way, so we are almost celebrating its 100 and 20th anniversary.

Now unfortunately it had to close down for quite a few years in the mid 80s. So it does not have the award of the oldest continuously operating coaster. That actually goes- I believe- you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that award goes to The Jackrabbit at Kennywood Park. That has been operating continuously without closing down since 1927. So Kennywood has one good thing going for them. I'm sorry, I'm not a Kennywood fan. But the Jackrabbit, it's a pretty cool fact that they have been operating that ride since 1927.

But Leap the Dips was built in 1902. They had to close it down because they didn't have the money to repair it and the repairs were so bad at the time that they were afraid it wasn't safe for guests to go up the hill. And I love the feeling of “Am I gonna make it back to the station in one piece?” that you get on some of these older rides. But I don't mean literally. I want to *literally* make it back to the station alive. But they didn't have the money to fix it. So they had to shut it down and it kind of just sat there. And since it's located right next to the highway, you could drive by and just see it sitting in the state of disrepair.

Luckily they were able to shave it. Yay! The American Coaster Enthusiast started a campaign to save the coaster from demolition because the wrecking ball was coming for this one. It was not something that a lot of people thought we should invest time and money into saving but thankfully a few people did and so in 1996 Leap the Dips was designated a National Historic Landmark, which basically meant you can't tear it down. You have to do everything you can to save it which- yay! That's really great because then what they were able to do was raise money. And they got carpenters in to really save the ride and make it safe again. Which is funny because riding it, it's still like “Am I gonna make it back to the station alive?” But at the same time, I know it has to be safe for them to operate. So it's that good feeling of “Am I going to make it back to the station alive?”

So, it's a ride that I think every single person should experience once in their life. That whole slide friction roller coaster is such a unique experience. Because, again, knowing that this ride was built before they realized that they should be strapping wheels on the top and the bottom of the track for safety. And for the newer rides, even on the side. This is literally just sitting on the top of the track.

And the fact that it's lasted this long and it's so unique, one hundred percent this is a ride that I recommend to everyone-even though it's only as tall as my home. Even though I think I can run faster than it. I don't know maybe I can run faster than it. I just had a kid so maybe give me a few weeks and I could probably run faster than it. But it still is one of those you have to ride it before you die kind of rides, and I don't say that about a lot of rides. But Leap the Dip is definitely one of those rides for me.

You've got to go. You've got to go and ride it and experience it. You will be completely underwhelmed and I know this. Everyone who gets off is kind of like “That's it?” And yeah, that's it. That's all it does. It's just gonna go real slow down a track. You're gonna get some bunny hops that make your teeth rattle a little. And then you're going to watch because when you arrive back in the station the poor station operator has to handbrake you to a stop. But that's what makes these old rides so wonderful! That’s what I love about the. I love the uniqueness of that. Where else are you going to find that? You're not, because it's the only one left in existence that's still fully operational.

So that's what these old rides bring to these amusement parks. I love B&M coasters, don't get me wrong. You can give me a leviathan kind of ride any day of the week and I'm there, I'm riding them, I'm having the best time of my life. But B&M, it's a copy paste kind of game. They find a ride formula that works and then they sell the same coaster to like twelve different parks. And it’s not a bad way to make money. I mean, obviously, it sells well but they didn’t have these coaster companies back then to really just spit all these same coasters out.

So the uniqueness of all these coasters is what I love about them! You’re not gonna find a Leap the Dips anywhere else in the world. And yeah, at the time they were built, you could find a lot of similar coasters to Leap the Dips all around America and, honestly, around most of the world. But people weren’t traveling back then as much as they were today. It was not as easy to just go from from city to city or country to country. So of course a lot of these were mass produced, because you probably weren't getting on more than two, three at the most and that was it. But now, the uniqueness, it's what makes it so much fun to ride.

So that's it. That's my spiel about why you should personally take the trip to Altoona to ride Leap the Dips. I hope that Lakemont Park is able to kind of survive the pandemic and thrive in the future. They've kind of changed their business model around in the recent years. In 2017 and 2018 they just completely shut the park down and sold a lot of their rides off. They used to have one of those amazing toboggan coasters. I don't know if you've ever seen one of those. But basically you take a single car up a very giant tower and then the track just wraps around the tower in a giant loop getting faster and faster as it goes all the way to the bottom. They're fantastically scary and I loved riding it but they got rid of a lot of rides like that. I guess it just didn't feel like it was worth the maintenance costs.

So now Lakemont Park is kind of more geared towards Family Fun Center, that kind of vibe. They have a small water park there, they have go-karts, and picnic facilities, and there's no cost for admission. You kind of just go in and pay for anything that you want to do individually. They have two coasters there still. They obviously still have Leap the Dips and they have an another old coaster called the Skyliner that they relocated from the middle of New York state. And honestly, at some point we could probably do a whole episode on the Skyliner because it's another really great, really classic wooden coaster. But other than that, and a couple of flat rides and kiddie rides, the ride part of Lakemont Park has kind of dried up. It's much more about that Family Fun Center vibe. So I hope they can survive. I really hope that this is something that the community can embrace as a place that they want to continue to go to.

But I don't know. I really don't know if it's gonna last. I hope it does. I hope 10 years from now, we find this podcast episode and I'm like, " Well, I was an idiot." I really do. I mean, honestly, I hope somebody really does take me up on my offer to buy Lakemont Park for me, but I'm assuming that's not going to happen. So we'll just hope that they find success in any business model. But just in case they don't,I don't know how much I can stress to you as a listener- go visit Lakemont Park while you can.

I want to hope that COVID hasn't completely killed their business off but we know that so many amusement parks are now going to be struggling to make money and struggling to make up for a year of lost business or low business. So if they opened this year, and their website- I did look it up today- their website does say that they're planning on opening for 2021. And we're recording this in early spring 2021. So fingers and toes crossed that this is true, but if they open, go take the trip.

Get your friends, get in the car and drive up to Altoona. There's not a ton to see up there. It will most definitely just be a weekend trip for you. But go while you can. Get on this ride and see just how amazing it is and how unique it is that this has somehow lasted almost 120 years and is still working. Don't get too freaked out either. Just by the lack of safety on it. Don't think about it too much. I'm an overthinker, I think too much about things. I'm an analyzer. I'm a planner. I'm a Type A kind of person. Don't go on to Leap the Dips and over-analyze it because you'll just really not enjoy your time. And you just need to sit back and take it in because it's fantastic.

And there we have it. Our first episode is in the books. I am kind of doing a little victory dance over here even though none of you guys can see it. It's a lot of work creating a podcast. So I just want to thank everybody who has helped with the research, and the analysis, and the learning how to do podcasting stuff.

It's been a long journey for us but we just had this idea that there has to be other people in the world who love old coasters and appreciate them the same way the people around here do so that's kind of just the whole idea behind this. So join us next week. We will be here again with part two of season one. We have a lot of great coasters coming up. I don't want to spoil any of them for you. But we usually do release a little preview of what's going to be dropping over on our Instagram.

You can follow us on Instagram @onceuponacoasterpod. All one word for those of you who like to put, you know, dashes between things. We are not dash people here. So that's @onceuponacoasterpod over on Instagram, and you can kind of get some ideas of where the season is going to take us and what coasters will be investigating. And also let us know what coasters you want us to look at, and to research, and to dig up some great photos for. That's one of my favorite things, finding these old photos of rides. Oh my goodness, I can do it all day. They're fantastic. So if you have any old photos of rides you'd like to share with us, let us know. We love them and we love sharing them. So thank you so much for listening and we can't wait to talk to you next week. Until then. See you soon!