

THE PRESIDENT'S MOSCOW ALBUM ■ BESS MYERSON'S ARREST

AUGUST 1988/\$2.50

# LIFE



# PEE-WEE

## HOW TO THROW THE COOLEST PARTY EVER



For 43 years  
Harold  
Feinstein has  
photographed  
Brooklyn's  
legendary  
amusement  
park

# CONEY



**1947** "The sailors were on their way back to Manhattan after a day at Coney Island. They seemed so lanky, like sloppy dolls."



**1951** "I love the aloneness of winter. This picture of Steeplechase Pier is about walking into infinity in the journey of life."



**1949** "The child probably didn't have any money to ride"

# ISLAND



the merry-go-round. To me she seemed prematurely old, a little girl missing out on her childhood. Her face is the reality, the horse is the fantasy."



1949 "I was standing on the boardwalk railing, a voyeur watching the people watch the people. I was moved by the pattern of the hats, almost an abstraction."



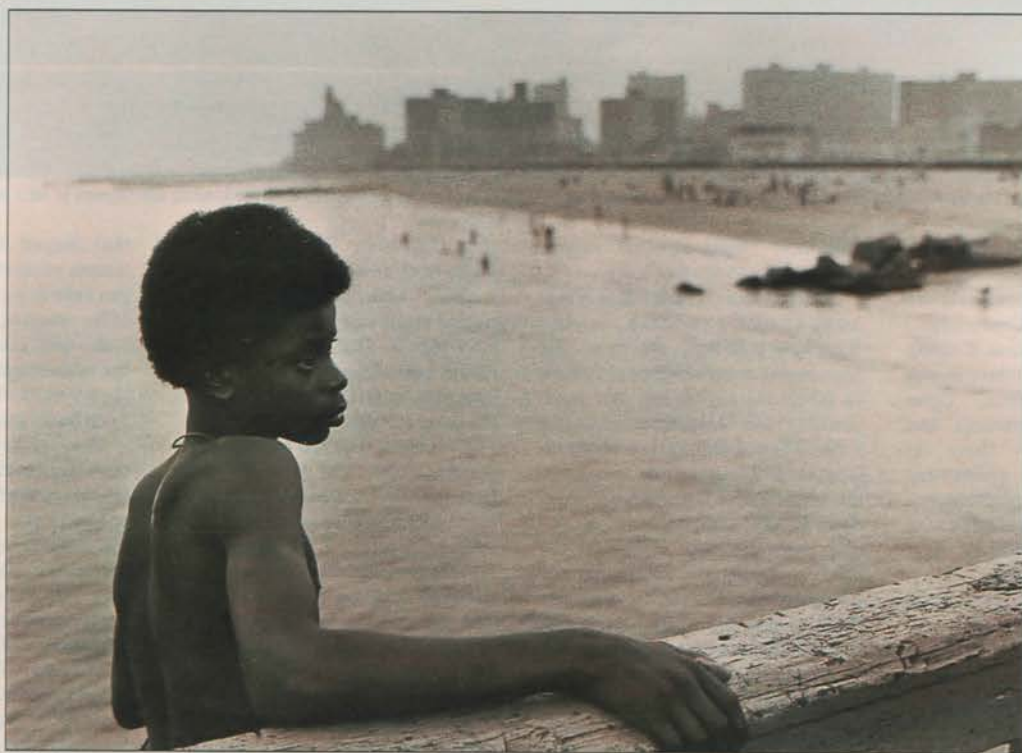
1946 "I took this when I was 15, near the amusement park."



1951 "The setting's impoverished, yet Christ is there."



**1949** "I was almost straddling these people. Everyone's entangled in such a wonderful way, like free-floating sculpture. People without clothes on tend to be less pretentious."



**1977** "The boy, unaware of me, was on the pier thirty feet up. A moment later he made an exuberant leap into the water."



1948 "A nice thing about the boardwalk is you can stand behind the benches. This old couple protecting themselves from the broiling sun seemed to me a very sculptural image."

Once they called it "the poor man's paradise." Not really an island but a peninsula of Brooklyn, N.Y., Coney Island offered a razzmatazz of cheap thrills. In the old days it was known as "a sinful place." Later there were three racetracks and prizefights were held there. It had three garishly lit amusement areas: Luna Park, Steeplechase and Dreamland. At the turn of the century, a 10-cent ticket bought 17 stomach-curdling rides: Shoot the Chutes, the Dragon's Gorge and the Cannon Coaster. The hot dog made its American debut at Coney in 1867, the roller coaster in 1884. Lots of people apprenticed there: Al Capone was a bouncer, Harry Houdini worked as an escape artist, Jimmy Durante played honky-tonk piano, and the fu-

ture Cary Grant strutted outside Steeplechase on six-foot stilts.

Today Coney's tacky charm still draws 14 million visitors a year, but the place just isn't the same. Its amusement area, which used to take up 20 oceanfront blocks, now occupies only nine. Steeplechase is mostly a vacant lot, Luna Park was demolished in 1949 to make way for a housing project, and Dreamland burned down in 1911—wild animals on display there perished. Rides like the 250-foot Parachute Jump and the Thunderbolt roller coaster are nothing but corroded skeletons. A Nathan's Famous hot dog, once a nickel, now costs \$1.48. Sums up novelist Mario Puzo, "... it breaks your heart to see what a slothful, bedraggled harriidan it has become..."

For photographer Harold Fein-

stein, however, Coney's glow remains undimmed. "Even when I was a child," says Feinstein, 57, "old-timers would say, 'Kid, you should have seen it.' But Coney Island has *always* been deteriorating. I look at kids now, and it's obvious they feel the same wonder I did."

Feinstein, who has been lovingly photographing the area for more than four decades, comes by his feelings naturally: He was born in Coney Island Hospital. "I fell right out of my mother's womb and landed on the sand with the smell of mustard and the sound of kids screaming on the Cyclone," says Feinstein, who, not surprisingly, also considers himself a poet.

Growing up just a few miles away, he used to spend summers hawking orange pop and beer, jobs

that helped finance his early attempts at photography. At 15 he began taking pictures while riding the roller coaster, or he would wade waist-deep into the surf to capture the million and a half sunbathers on the beach. "I thought I'd be arrested, I was having such a wonderful time."

Though he now lives in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, Feinstein still takes the hour-long subway ride to Coney once or twice a year. There the intimacy of the crowds gets to him every time. "People can lead very safe lives," he says, "and suddenly at Coney Island they become daredevils and show-offs."

The poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti called one of his books *A Coney Island of the Mind*. Feinstein believes there is—and always will be—a Coney Island of the heart too. □