

Family Drive-In

The Family Drive-In as told to Patchwork by Jim Hartman
Interviewed by Brittany Reibsome, Hannah Creveling, and Samie Campenni in the spring
of 2005.

The Family Drive-In was a place for families and young people to go watch a movie. It was located at the corner of Route 11 and Central Road, where the old Giant was. It operated through the 60's, and closed late 60's, early 70's.

Mr. James "Jim" Hartman worked as a night manager for the Family Drive-In. As night manager, he looked over the projection area, the concession stand, and the tickets. He also did the night deposit and repairs. He is now 61 and is a math teacher at Central Columbia. He was born and raised in Columbia County.

PATCHWORK: My name is Samantha Campenni, I'm Hannah Creveling, and I'm Brittany Reibsome.

HARTMAN: And I'm Jim Hartman.

PATCHWORK: Nice to meet you. We're going to ask you some questions on when you worked at the Drive-In Theater. Why did you choose to work at the Drive-In Theater?

HARTMAN: Uhh, the hours of the job fit my daily schedule, cause it was a second job, and I needed the money. It wasn't too hard a job, it was a fun thing. Got to see the movies, so mainly just extra money and after school cause that's when I was teaching.

PATCHWORK: So you said this was your second job?

HARTMAN: Yes, I was teaching during the day, and that's in my younger years and you didn't make much teaching, so you almost had a second job if you wanted to get ahead a little bit.

PATCHWORK: And what did you exactly do?

HARTMAN: I started off in repair work repairing speakers and helping out down in concession stand. I think in about a year they hired me as kind of a manager. But you had to take the payroll for the bank. I had to check to make sure everything was going well out in the ticket booth. Oh, people showed up for the, uh, concession stand that you had food for concession stand, make sure that was running well. And a, sometimes maybe a projectionist would need a break so you would go watch the projection while he was out. Uhh, had to watch for people sneakin in the Drive-In. I think those were about all my duties.

PATCHWORK: Did anybody ever sneak into the Drive-In?

HARTMAN: Oh, that was a game, yeah yes, they'd sneak in the trunks, they would. Uh, one guy would pay, and pay to get in and he'd pull in and he'd open his trunk, uh, and then five guys would pile out of the trunk, you know, and then you would have to go over and knock on the windows, "Can I see your tickets?" and make them pay. Uh, a lot of times the one guy would drive in and they'd sneak in through the back. There was no fence across the back so when the movie started and everything was dark, you know, four or five people whatever could just walk right into the grounds and get in the car, you know. That was, that was harder to see what was going on there. Some people would drive in the exit. Uh, that was about the only three ways that I, that I knew of they get in.

PATCHWORK: Umm, did you ever have to fire somebody being the manager?

HARTMAN: No, but I had to take care of when people would quit. I had to take care of people being hired. And I interviewed mostly high school students, see if they would, you know, help out, if their jobs would, if their hours would fit when we needed them. And uh, I had to do a little research, see if they were reliable folks, check out high school whether they were good at attendance. Oh, I'd maybe call a teacher or two and then if everything passed, we'd hire them. Never had to fire anybody, no.

PATCHWORK: What qualities were you looking for in people that you were hiring?

HARTMAN: Well, I was looking for people that would always be there. So I wanted somebody that was at school 98% of the time, showed up every day, that of person, cause I knew if I was coming to work, they would be there every day, he or she. Uh, needed somebody that would get along with people, cause uh, ticket, uh, ticket takers,

and you have people that work behind concession stand. And pleasant, you know. And that was about it. As long as I knew they could make it to work and they were nice folks, we, we always hired them, you know. We never had any trouble getting people either. They always, they didn't pay real well in those days, but they always paid a little above minimum, you know.

PATCHWORK: What was the exact cost to see a movie?

HARTMAN: Oh boy, it was back there a long time. I would say that uh, to get in the theater, I think two or three dollars apiece, per person. And hot dogs were probably like, uh, fifty cents, and I forget what else, they had popcorn. I think everything in those days was about half-expensive of what it is now. And it was higher at the Family Drive-In then what it was at some other place because it was just like the theater downtown now, you know.

PATCHWORK: What was the oddest thing that you ever had to repair at the Drive-In?

HARTMAN: Well, the speakers kept going. You'd have to go out every night and check all the speakers, well, you'd take maybe two rows a night. Check all the speakers, make sure they worked. If they didn't work, you'd have to pull the cap off with two screws, take the two screws off that held the two wires, put a new speaker on, and put the cap back on. And they were, they'd break, you could check out, three rows a night. By the end of the week you'd have the whole field checked. By next week, you'd find some of the speakers broke. And I always had to repair the speakers. As far as things in concession stand, I didn't have, the uh, aptitude for that. I had to call people in to repair the uh, deep fat fryers and the popcorn maker would go on the fritz, you know. Short a fuse once in a while, maybe a fuse would blow, the breaker would have to be replaced. Other than that, I say the speakers were the only things you'd have to repair there.

PATCHWORK: So it wasn't like listening to it on the radio like you do now, they give you stations?

HARTMAN: No. you'd have to pull into the posts. You know in some of these places you have posts. Well, each side of those posts is a hook, and you'd have a little round speaker. A little bigger than this decoration on the table, and they had a hook in the back. And then on the side you had a little button for volume. So the people would take that off the hook, put it on their mirrors, or on their window, roll their window up, and

then they could adjust the sound on it. So it was piped in through speakers, on these individual posts. Nowadays, it's a lot more convenient to have it through a station. They can just pull in, and they use the radio. You don't have to worry about repairing speakers. That was a neat idea when it came out. But, the only other thing that would happen a lot of the times people would forget to take the speakers off their windows. And so you'd see this wire dangling out of the car. They'd either bring it in, most of the time they'd bring it in, "Oh, I just drove off" and it wouldn't wreck their window but the wire would usually pull off, you know. That's all right, you know, I'd just go back out and hook it right back up. There was no problem. But that was always kind of weird when they'd pull out, not taking the speaker off the window first. That would happen maybe once every two to three weeks, you know.

PATCHWORK: So did you do all these repairs alone, or did you have someone to help?

HARTMAN: No, I usually did it myself. After I got the, the movie started, and until you're, uh, intermission, I'd go down and help out intermission a little bit too, well, than that gives you about an hour and a half. Then I'd always go up and work on the speakers every night, you know. And you'd only have to repair, maybe, you'd have maybe five a night, you'd have to repair, and it didn't take long, you just, usually the speaker was broke in it. You just, uh, took the cover off, and the speakers right there with two screws, took that off, there was a little snap, unsnap it, throw it away, you know, hook up the other speaker. Two screws, put the cover back on it, and that was ready to go the next night, you know. So it was a constant replace and repair. It took maybe, five speakers, maybe a half hour, forty minutes at the most. So you still had plenty of time to like goof off, go down and check make sure everything was going well with concession stand, they're ready for intermission, you know.

PATCHWORK: Ok, um, where was the Drive-In exactly?

HARTMAN: The Drive-In Theater was located where the old Giant store was. It was that whole complex right there, uh, Big Lots is there now. That whole complex, that whole thing right there was, that whole parking lot, and those stores, that was all Family Drive-In. The screen faced toward Berwick and it was toward that road, uh, Central Road comes down there, it was there. They had fence halfway around it. And it was all fields behind there, where now there's all buildings and businesses. And that's where the kids used to walk in, to come into the theater, you know.

PATCHWORK: How many screens were there?

HARTMAN: Just one. In those days, they only had one screen per drive in. They didn't have the multi-screen situation like they have now. They only had, they had upstairs, they had two projectors. And that's not how they have it nowadays, either. When you see your dots in the corner, I don't know if you've ever seen any old old films. There will be a dot that comes up in the corner. That warns the projector to get ready. He'll start his other projector running, he has another roll of film in that, and that'll start running. When you see the second dot, there was two handles there, you just threw two handles. You close this machine down, and then, you put the projection on over here when it was already running. And then, that was ready to go. Then he would unload this machine, get it ready with the next reel. Now, usually, it would be three to four reels per movie. Nowadays, when they come, they just have a big round roll, it's just one continuous roll, they thread it through the machine, it starts and stops. There's no switching machines or anything, just a constant, just one machine that constantly runs. But in those days, you had to switch back and forth. And another thing that was neat about that, and once in a while I'd have to do that, inside the projector, to get such a large light, there wasn't a light bulb. It was like two welding rods, and they'd always stay this far apart and they'd burn like a welding rod, you know how hot they burn, and it just kept burning like that. Well, eventually, these rods would burn down, like, uh, maybe they would run over four reels, so that would be over one night, you'd have to replace those rods. And they're little, oh, they were about this long, and they're copper. Copper jacketed and they had some kind of a welding rod composition inside and that's so that would be that intense light cause you'd have to have a lot of light. Now I don't know what they have nowadays, I don't know if they have the rods like that or if they have bulbs. I haven't seen the newer ones, but I do know they're one continuous roll. So that was always pretty neat.

PATCHWORK: Were there any like big movies that came into the Drive-In? Like, premieres or anything?

HARTMAN: No, they were like our drive ins nowadays. They get, you know, they get the average movies, and they're, they're not the latest. Usually they go to the regular theater first, then they come out to your drive-ins second, you know. Or they'll be showing the same time, but you don't have a movie at the drive in that's a premiere, that nobody else has, like the regular theater, like our, what's it called, Cinema Eight down there. He always gets the first run movie, you know. Now our Drive-In once in a while would have'em running at the same time. We had a Capital and a Columbia down in Bloomsburg where the Columbia Theater is now. It's a theater, uh, Bloomsburg theater group. Well, that was the Columbia Theater, and they had one uptown where, next to Al's Men's Shop, there, that was the Capital Theater. They had two theaters in Bloom and they had the Family Drive-In.

PATCHWORK: Like for competition, was the Point around when the Drive-In was around?

HARTMAN: Those days we didn't do all that traveling as we do now. But I think the Point, that's an old theater. They had one over towards Hazleton, going out of Berwick, that's on the left side and the screens still up for that. But that ground isn't being used anymore, I think the township bought that, and they have, they use the building on that ground has their office and the screen still stays there. And I'm not sure about the one up towards, uh, Wilkes-Barre, up above Berwick and Nescopeck. There's another one on the right hand side towards, uh, I forget the name of that one. We go up there once awhile. It's above Nes, uh, Shickshinny about, uh, five, six miles above there, before you get to Kingston Corners. But those, I think all those were in existence in the old day, but not that many people drive that far. They come down, if they were in this group, in this area they would come down to the Family Drive-In or they'd go to the Bloom, uh, theaters in Bloomsburg, you know.

PATCHWORK: Was it a big teenager thing or more family?

HARTMAN: Little bit of both, depending on the movie. If you had a war movie or something, I think a lot of teenager, middle age group would come. But if you had Bambi or Walt Disney movies, something that all families would show, you know what I mean. They do what they do nowadays. They come and put their blankets out on the ground and put their chairs up and get their coolers out. A lot of times they would just bring their own food and everything instead of going to the snack bar, you know. So it depended on your movie as to what crowd you would draw.

PATCHWORK: What other places did you have to hang out, other than the Drive-In? What do you think would be the main places?

HARTMAN: Oh, the one that just shut down is May's. Oh, kids would gather around there, they would go down Friday, Saturday nights, for the cars park down there to sit on, they didn't care about their cars, sit on the hood, you know. And they just, you know, hung out there. We'd go down and drive around the square at Bloomsburg, then come back up to May's. Then you wanted to burn a little gas up, you'd go up to Berwick, uh, around where Kan Motors is now. I think it up a little bit further than that. I can't think what was up there now, where abouts that eyeglass place is, uh, Berwick eyeglass and a McDonald's, right across the street from there's called Pollock's and that's long gone. Now that was above when you pull in your car and they'd come out and wait on you and they put a tray in your window. You go around there, you know, or sit there and grabbed a soda if you get barbeque, they had good barbeque. When you're done there,

you race back down to Bloom and if you didn't want to do all that racing, you could go to the Drive-In first or a theater then do that later on, like, at nine, nine thirty till midnight, you know. So that was, there weren't a lot of, oh, and they had the, uh, grill in Bloomsburg. That was up over top where Balzanos has the Balzanos corner something, it's called. On top of that was called the grill. That was a long time ago and that was another place to hang out. Charlie's Pizza place in Bloom is another one. I didn't hang out there a lot, um, I think that's the strong places in town, you know, where all the kids would go.

PATCHWORK: What time would the movies roughly start? At dusk?

HARTMAN: At dusk, just like they do now, and they would be over about the same time that the theaters. They ran about the same time.

PATCHWORK: So did they run two a night like they do now?

HARTMAN: Yeah, and sometimes they would repeat. You run your first one, your second one, and if you get started early enough in the evening, you could show your first one back over again because people would come late, you know. They might come towards the end of the first, uh, the first movie so you'd show your second film which wasn't usually as good. Then, if you had enough time, you'd show the other one again too, but, uh, I would say right now when it's getting dark early and they'd open in the spring, you could do that, but in the summer time it stays light till nine o'clock, you didn't have enough time. You'd be way out into the morning, you know, you had to run what each was, you know.

PATCHWORK: So when would it close? You said it opened in the spring.

HARTMAN: Uh, just like now, open in the spring, run till October, maybe so, you know, uh, about fair week, somewhere in that area. Then it would shut down in the winter. I don't really, I forget when it really closed down. When it closed down, that's when Giant, actually, Giant wasn't there first. It was a Nickels and that was down there about where Big Lots is right now, was a Nickels and they're out of business now a long time ago. And once they went out, they were there for, um, three, I don't know three, four, five, six years, maybe. Then they went out of business and then that's when Giant moved in and those other little stores along with it, and they've been there ever since.

PATCHWORK: So what was it like in the Drive-In, other than being, like, if you went there just have, to the movies?

HARTMAN: That's what you went for, that was it. Just the movie, they didn't have dances or anything in all that nature. They did have a swing set and a few things up there for the kids, you know, if you came early. The family would take the kids up, they had swings and a sliding board there. Recreational things for the kids to play with till the movie started, you know, but that was about it.

PATCHWORK: How popular were the drive-in movies?

HARTMAN: Oh, I think they're pretty popular. We usually drew a pretty good crowd on the weekends. Through the week it was a little bit too late for the, you know, families or anybody. Usually had a few cars through the week, but the weekends, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, was the big nights.

PATCHWORK: So would you say it was more popular during the summer months at the drive-in?

HARTMAN: Yeah, well it's even more popular then it is now. Now they go down here to the Cinema Center Eight, you know, you don't, even a drive-in, they're not as popular as what they used to be. We went to one last year where there was, uh, popular film, at the Hemlock Creek, I think it is, drive-in, Hemlock Drive-in. One I was talking about above Nanticoke, and uh, that was packed. I had never saw a drive-in like that in the last 15 years of my life. And it was packed. A lot of families went cause now what they do is they charge like, \$5 a car or \$10. You can take the whole family for \$10. Back in the old days it was like 2, 3 dollars a piece. When you go down here it's like what, \$7 a piece, take your family for \$28. You can go to the drive-in for \$10. So it was packed that night. I was glad to see that, you know.

PATCHWORK: When did the drive- in exactly close?

HARTMAN: Oh, I, I don't know when that would be exactly. A long time ago, you know how long it's been since Giant's been, well since they closed down and they were there how many years and it was probably five years before that so, I would say in the early 70's, late 60's it closed down.

PATCHWORK: So were you still working there?

HARTMAN: Yeah, that was my last, I was the last manager they had. Yeah, the gentlemen just didn't, like I said, it lost popularity and the ground was worth more than what he was making. So he could sell that ground, put the money in the bank, collect more interest than what he was making on the theater, you know. So he sold that to these, the ones right down here, Giant and those times it was a Nickels, and he made more money. So they probably, I don't know what he did with it, but he, they just tore it all down, tore the screens down and leveled it and put up new buildings. I can't, it has to be in the early 70's though I know that, I would say early 70's late 60's that it was closed down.

PATCHWORK: Did you have a lot of fun working there? Did you make a lot of friends?

HARTMAN: Yeah, people work at the concession stands. Except most of the kids at the concession stands were high school students and I was teaching at the time. I was pretty young, uh, it was fun, it was, you know, it was, it was warm out. I was outside a lot of the time, except when I would fix the speakers. I enjoyed the job, I worked there for, uh, I can't even say anymore. I think 5 to 8 years I worked there. I would have stayed working there as long as they would of kept it open, you know.

PATCHWORK: What was your most memorable experience while working there?

HARTMAN: Boy, it was so long ago I don't know if I have a memorable experience or not. Imagine catching, I used to have fun playing detective, going catching the guys in the cars, you know, knocking on the windows, "Can I see your ticket?" Oh, here's one, um, you know they couldn't dig the other ones up, so I'd say you guys, your either going to have to leave or your gonna have to pay. Usually they'd pay you, you know. But that, I remember that was the fun part of it, you know. Going down and catching the guys sneaking in cause they always thought they weren't going to get caught, you know. Projectionist and I would sit there by the window and you could see out over the lot pretty well, you know. So we'd, "Chip, Chip, come here, come here, come here, over there, that car over there, trunk's open, watch um." And then when the trunk came out, the light would come on and you'd see it, but they'd only do it real quick. Then I'd go over and "It's an old Nash Rambler". I'd go over and get em and that was fun. I enjoyed that. But it wasn't a hard job, it was just, uh, it was a neat job and you made money out of it so, that's nice, you know.

PATCHWORK: What was your favorite job to do as a manager, cause you said you did the concession stands, and the projection stand?

HARTMAN: I liked it all, there wasn't really. I liked going down at break time and helping them, cause they'd get really busy down there. So maybe I'd run over and help them with the popcorn machine cause I could handle that. Then the girls would do the hot dogs and, I don't know what all they had there but hot dogs and hamburgers. They'd do that and I could handle the popcorn, you know and help them out, or draw soda for them. Fixing the speakers, that's like a 40 minute job so there was always fun. All those things were fun, you know, that's why I kinda enjoyed the job, you know. I don't think I had a favorite thing that I really really enjoyed, you know.

PATCHWORK: Was working at the drive-in one of your favorite jobs that you've ever had?

HARTMAN: Yeah, I think, it wasn't real hard, it was a lot of fun. It was varied. You were doing a lot of little things at night and just like that, the night was over. You made money and you enjoyed it, you know. Some nights it was pretty long though, if you had a real, real long run, two long run movies, it could be late till you get home, like maybe 11:30, 12:30 till I got home, got to bed, got ready to go to school the next day, everything, packed my lunch, you know. It might be 1:00 till I went to bed and that made it pretty hard sometimes. Usually you were home by midnight though and I'd get up the next day around, oh, maybe about 7 cause then our school didn't start as early, then it started later. Like about 8 you'd have to be there so I'd get up at 7, get to work. So I would get 7 hours, 6 hours of sleep and I was ok. But some of the, if I had any negative, it would be some of the nights were a little bit long, you know, in the week, weeknights cause we ran all week, it ran every night, you know.

PATCHWORK: Did that affect you at school?

HARTMAN: Some of the days you'd be a little tired, you'd say, ok now I, you know, tonight I got to get to bed earlier, you know, I can't go out around, I got to get home and right to bed. Yeah, oh yeah anytime you're not, you're tired at school, you don't feel well, you know how that is, day drags and it's just like, uh, you know, you can't wait to get home. So I always try to make sure I'm, even nowadays I make sure I get my rest cause it's the same thing if I don't go to bed, I stay up and watch a movie. You go to school nowadays, day drags, it's terrible. I hate it, you know, just because it seems so long and you don't feel good.

PATCHWORK: Did you actually get to watch any of the movies?

HARTMAN: Oh yeah, oh no, you'd sit there big, there'd be a big picture window right there and you'd be fixing your speakers and you could sit there and watch the movies, you know. And then when you were over helping the projectionist they had, he would run downstairs, need something in his car, something, maybe he just wanted a plain old break for 10, 15 minutes, I, I, you could watch it through, he had a little hole right there, he could watch the movie cause he had to see that little flash come up in the corner you see. And, uh, sometimes, once in a while, I think his name was Benny, he'd get, he'd forget, he'd be over there sitting in his chair you know, and he wouldn't be watching it and that spot would come on. All the sudden, there'd be black on the screen, cause this one ran out and he never threw the thing over to this one. So it'd be black, and people start blowing their horns, you know. Oh, he'd jump up and go and flip that. Then it would be running and everybody was happy, you know. But now, see with a continuous roll you don't worry about that, but you'll still see that dots up in there, up on the screen. I watch once in a while, if you don't trim them out when they make that big roll, they'll still be there. That means that's the end of the roll. That's how they send it to these companies, they send it to them still in maybe 3, 4 big pans. Then the projectionist's job is to flash all the, slice all those together in one big roll, then when he sends it back, he has to know where those are and that's what those dots tell him. Yeah, it's a pretty neat, oh, I got to see all those movies, you know. Do you have any more questions you can think of? It's a long time ago. It's a thing gone by the, you know. That drive-ins done over there towards Hazleton, this one's done, the Point's still functional cause they went to three screens like you said, three or four, I think they might, do they have five screens down at the Point? Have you guys ever been down there to the Point?

PATCHWORK: Last time I was there it was three.

HARTMAN: All right then, that's what it is. I think the same way up here, Hemlock Creek. You ever been up to that one?

PATCHWORK: No, the only time I've ever been to like a drive-in type of thing was when they do a projector on one of those things at the college.

HARTMAN: Oh, did they. I hear they're kinda neat to go to. My wife and I still go to them just because it's like a tradition. We'll go one time a year. At least one time a year, that's just a tradition. We go every year, you know, at least one time. So you ought to try the drive-in, it's pretty neat. You take your own snacks and everything and it's real nice, you put your chairs, and if the bugs aren't bad, you put your chairs out along the car, and you sit right there in the fresh air, pack a cooler of soda and everything, you know. Yeah, it's pretty, people even take their grills now. Yeah, the one guy was grilling on top his

car. He had his kids all over there, grease all over his hood and he's doing hamburgers and hot dogs, having a good time. They never did that too much in the old days. They would pack stuff but they didn't actually grill there, you know. But I thought that was pretty neat.

PATCHWORK: Was the Drive-In one of the first drive-ins in the area?

HARTMAN: I don't know who was first. I know all these drive-ins, the ones we talked about there in Hazleton, up the river and ours were all in existence at the time when I can recall, you know. So I don't know which one really came along first, probably all went into existence about the same time, you know, cause that was a popular thing in the old days.

PATCHWORK: I think we're done here. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you.

HARTMAN: Are we, ok, it was fun going back a few years.