

When people visit an amusement park, what's usually the first thing they think about? Roller coasters? Rides? Maybe even the food? Usually it's not the live entertainment. If live shows even cross a usual park guest's mind, it's to escape the heat or rest their feet from walking. That's what makes Debbie and Mark Obarka's, *Happy Hookbills* show, at Worlds of Fun in Kansas City, Mo., so outstanding. It is not your traditional,



job at Busch Gardens as the train conductor, she was sending herself in a direction that would lead her on to what she would do for many years after Busch Gardens was just a memory. She began as many do at their summer jobs, as a temporary seasonal employee. However, five short months later, she was hired permanently by Busch Gardens. At first it was just as a street sweeper, what many would consider a menial job. But, what most

living with nine of your own birds 20-plus years later? It started with the Busch Gardens Bird Show, that's the easy answer, but like so many who really do enjoy what they do in life, it goes a lot further than just going where life leads. It usually has a catalyst or a point in time that affects everything that goes forward. With Debbie, it was as simple as walking into the bird house where the birds at Busch Gardens were stored between shows, and she was hooked. She knew that from that day on that the highly intelligent birds would fill her life and, in doing so, fill in the blanks for the rest of her life as well.

feathered follies

DEBBIE AND MARK OBARKA SHARE THEIR LOVE FOR THEIR BIRDS AND EACH OTHER.

BY JENNIFER LOVESEE-MAST

sometimes boring, more than often repetitive park show. It's quite a surprise in its ingenuity. Its entertaining, fun and even educational in some respects. But, like many people, Debbie and Mark did not start out their careers with birds; in fact



their story, like so many others, starts very far from where it is now, at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay.

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, then known as Busch Gardens Dark Continent, started the career of Debbie Obarka at a time when she had no direction in life. When she started her first

don't realize is, that even though most people start out at the same point, it's the attitude that propels them forward. Anyone who has ever met Debbie will find out that a positive, almost bubbly, attitude comes as part of the pack-

age. It was probably the overly positive attitude towards her job, and finding ways to enjoy it, that promoted her to a monorail driver, and then to the job that would lead her forward in life, a part in the Busch Gardens Bird Show.

How does one go from working as a monorail driver, to running a full time bird show and

Before we can move on in our story there is one last component, one last piece of the puzzle that has been sorely missed. The Bird Show itself and Debbie's experiences over the past two decades would have been incomplete or never had happened if it had not been for the second half of the duo, Mark. Debbie and Mark had met in high school in Buffalo, N.Y. in the late 70's. Not long after graduation Mark headed down to Tampa to attend the University of Southern Florida while Debbie stayed behind for a short time until she too headed down to Tampa to be with Mark. It wasn't long after, in 1980, that she started working at Busch Gardens and, two years later, the two were married. Today Debbie and Mark are the hosts and producers