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"Everybody's a winner!" a weary barker, his voice competing with amplified hip-hop, hollered to the occasional passer-by on Stillwell Avenue yesterday. Natasha Alonso, 10, held a bag of cotton candy as she stood behind a fluttering cordon of police tape and gazed at the broken remains of her favorite ride, the Super Himalaya, which malfunctioned on Friday night, killing a 17-year-old girl and injuring eight other people.

"I'll never go on that again," Natasha said. Her mother, Griselle, nodded, adding: "You're not going on any of these rides."

Funnel-cake hawkers, ticket vendors and ride operators agreed that the crowds at Coney Island's amusement parks yesterday were noticeably thinner and more skittish than usual.

Gloria Ortiz, a travel agent from Brooklyn, would not let her grandson go on any rides, saying they looked too old. "I'd rather take him to Six Flags in Jersey or to Hershey Park,"

she said. "I don't trust the ones here."

City officials are still investigating the cause of the accident, which happened at about 11:20 P.M. on Friday while cars of the ride were spinning in reverse. But witnesses and several employees who work at nearby attractions said the accident was caused by a piece of painted wood that fell from the ceiling.

Joe Peralt, 29, the operator of a children's swing ride across from the Super Himalaya, said that a piece of wood became wedged between the track and a wheel on one of the cars, snapping a metal couple between the cars. That caused one car to flip to one side, he said, tossing its occupant, Nadine Caban, to her death.

Yesterday at least one of the painted wooden panels lay splintered on the ground as a worker with a measuring tape examined the wreckage. The worker declined to talk about the incident, and the ride's owner, Norman Kaufman, could not be reached for comment.

A spokesman for the Buildings Department said the ride was inspected on March 27, although he said he was not certain whether the inspection included nonmechanical elements like scenery.

The ride has had troubles before. In 1989, seven people were hurt when a metal bar holding a decorative canopy came loose and struck riders. It was also cited and briefly closed in 1984 when inspectors found electrical violations.

Mr. Kaufman also owns the Jumbo Jet, a roller coaster adjacent to the Super Himalaya that had a spate of problems in 1996, including one that injured two people when a wheel fell off one of the cars. Last summer, a worker at another ride owned by Mr. Kaufman was seriously injured when he fell. The ride, a bungee-jumping tower called The Screamer, was never opened.

Thomas Tornetto, 44, a maintenance worker who has assembled numerous rides at Coney Island, defended Mr. Kaufman, who he said

never skimps on upkeep.

"He's just had bad luck," Mr. Tornetto said. "He's not one of these guys who wants to make a quick buck."

The owners of Coney Island's two biggest amusement parks, Astroland and Deno's Wonderwheel Amusement Park, declined to comment on Mr. Kaufman's maintenance record but said they had no connection to his attractions, which are a few blocks away. "We cannot control what happens beyond our gates," said Dennis Vourderis, a co-owner of Deno's, who added that neither his park nor Astroland had had a serious accident in more than a decade.

A spokesman for Astroland, Dick Zigun, said that in addition to twice-a-year city inspections, rides at both parks are checked daily by company employees. "And that doesn't include inspections by the insurance company and the ride manufacturers," he said.

Still, both men were clearly concerned about public perception, espe-

cially as Coney Island struggles to recapture some of its lost glory, from the days before Steeplechase Park and Luna Park were bulldozed for public housing projects.

"We're on an upswing, but we still have a stigma to fight," said Mr. Vourderis, 40, who began working on the boardwalk at 8 hawking Italian ices.

Michael Binder and his wife, Nancy, knew about the accident but didn't sound worried as they stood beneath the roar of the Jumbo Jet, a few paces from where Ms. Caban died. "That's life, accidents happen," said Mr. Binder, 46, a construction worker from Canarsie. "You could walk across the street and get hit by a car."

His son, Danny, 10, wasn't so ready to tempt fate. Asked by his father if he wanted to go on the roller coaster, he looked up warily and shook his head. "Maybe later," he said.