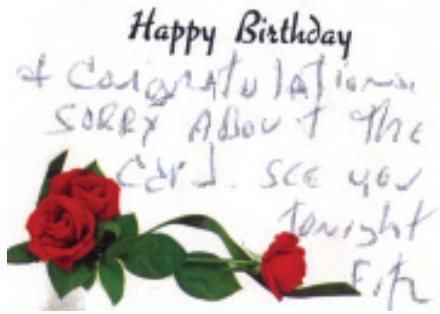




"The first time ever I saw your face, I thought the sun rose in your eyes, and the moon and the stars were the gifts you gave."

~Roberta Flack.



Always In My Heart

BY LOUANN CATANOSO



Fitz & LouAnn, High School years



Fitz & LouAnn, 1995

I met my true love in Wildwood in the fall of 1969, but I didn't know it. Michael Fitzpatrick came to Wildwood Catholic High School from St. Raymonds Grade school. He had an attitude problem, a chip on his shoulder, and he could be crude at times, but, I saw right through his façade; he was a "big teddy bear."

We had never spoken or been introduced, but one day in the school cafeteria he challenged me to a game of 'football'. From what I can remember, the object of the game was to flick a pack of matches across the table towards each other. Whoever got closest to the edge, without going off the table, won the game. Needless to say, I got lucky and won every time. I believe he called me a few 'choice names' (with a devilish smile on his face) and we became 'fast friends'. I couldn't resist his 'charm'!

Throughout our high school years our friendship grew. I knew that 'Fitz' wished it could have been more, but I had a steady boyfriend during those years, and I just didn't feel 'that way' about him; or, so I thought. But, in spite of that, we were 'best buddies'. We would go ice skating together, and to the duck pond to feed the ducks; and we would spend hours on the phone every night talking. Many years later, he would still insist that 'these were still among his fondest of memories.'

We had our differences. For example, he would claim to be a 'liberal', and I was, and still am a 'conservative republican', who is also a 'feminist'. (Yes, that is possible). But, we had enough respect for each other to listen to each others opinions, and points of view; and then we would just 'agree to disagree'. And, when we slow danced, he wouldn't 'yell at me' when I would lead! He never felt threatened or intimidated by my individuality.

On the other hand, we both enjoyed Clint Eastwood, James Bond, and Bogart movies. ("I remember every detail; the army was wearing gray, and you were wearing blue." Humphrey Bogart-Casablanca). And, our music interests were the same; Dylan, Harrison, Aretha, Dr. Hook, Gilbert O'Sullivan, Todd Rundgren, and the Raspberries, were just a 'few' of our favorites. But, Fitz knew if he came to my

place the stereo would most likely be playing The Fifth Dimension, War, Barry White, Motown, Helen Reddy, Bob Marley, Rodger Whittaker, and Sly and the Family Stone.

There is a slight chance he may have owned up to listening to all of this music, except for my collection of classic country, and Broadway show tunes albums. (Sweet Charity, West Side Story, Pippin!) But, I knew he enjoyed them, and that's all that mattered. Okay, I admit it, I'm obsessed with music since birth. (There are worse things in the world.)

Over the years, when Fitz would profess his love for me, I would ask him how he could be satisfied with just 'being my friend'. He told me that he would rather have me in his life as 'just a good friend, then not to have me at all'. He would say to me, "You love me, you just don't know it yet". And, he would usually follow that statement with, "When you realize you're crazy about me, you'll know where you can reach me".

He was the one, that would send me flowers on Valentines Day; and he was the one that I would spend almost every birthday with. My birthday is June 6th, and his birthday was June 10th. And, he was the one that would hug me, when someone else broke my heart.

We had come a long way together. Our activity of choice had become watching the sun set, on a bench, at the bay in Townbank. Our days as teenagers, and playing flag football on the North Wildwood beach after school with the gang, were long behind us. Fitz always said that we had four songs; 'Wild World' and 'How Can I Tell You', by Cat Stevens, 'Two Out of Three Ain't Bad', by Meatloaf, and 'My Eyes Adored You', by Frankie Valli. And since his passing in 1996, it has not surprised me in the least, to hear any two of these songs played back to back on the radio, more than once.

We had settled into a beautiful, mature friendship, and genuine love for each other over our 26 year relationship together. And, he was right; I do know where to reach him. 'He is right here, in my heart, where he has always been'. 'Happy Valentines Day Fitz'. 'I love You'....



Louann's Annual Christmas party 1995
(L-R) Front ~ Fitz, John, Charlene, Alice,
Back ~ Sue Eileen, EvaMarie, Dianne



Best Friends: Fitz & Chris McDevitt, mid 90s



LouAnn & Baby Lauren



Dedication: This story is dedicated to my sister, Cathy. I want to thank her for her constant, unconditional love and support; and also for thinking of this wonderful title for my story.