



"Happiness is not a destination. It is a method of life." – Burton Hills



Lisa Graeff, Wildwood by-the-sea, 1969



Larry and Susan Graeff with baby Lisa on the Wildwood boardwalk, 1965

My Wildwood Story

AS TOLD BY LISA GRAEFF-SMITH...

It began in August of 1965 when at 15 months old I made my very first trip to Wildwood-By-the-Sea. At the time, my extended family took that glorious once a year, week-long vacation in a rented apartment on Cresse Ave. As a child, I spent the whole year anticipating that one week of beach, boardwalk and being with my family. I recall my mom using Wildwood as bribery (ask her about the potty training incident sometime). If I didn't behave, I was told that I would stay home while everyone else went on vacation. I was the best behaved child on the face of the Earth for the months of July and August!

Leaving Wildwood was always tough. It got to the point where my parents would try to get me to fall asleep before we left so they wouldn't have to listen to me cry all the way home - really!! I have a very vivid memory of being about 4 or 5 years old. I can even remember what I was wearing - a blue and white checkered seersucker sundress. My uncle had found a starfish on the back bay at low tide and had given it to me. I was holding the stinky, dried up starfish, standing on the back seat of our old white Dodge and looking out the rear window as we went over the Rio Grande Bridge. I was just sobbing. There was no consoling me on these trips home. My parents didn't even try. I would sob myself into exhaustion.

As I grew up, my love of Wildwood grew stronger. It became the place where I first felt independence. Once I was old enough to bring a friend along for the week, we would walk the boards, riding the rides and checking out boys. I remember feeling so grown up and mature being on the boardwalk without an adult but, we were always careful to be back to the apartment by our scheduled curfew time so as not to forfeit our chance to hit the boards again the following night sans parents!!

Years later, as an adult, Wildwood became

more accessible. The single one week trip gave way to several shorter stays, mostly over holiday weekends, as well as the occasional day trip turned night at the clubs. These trips were not with family but instead with a bunch of single girlfriends. We would all pack into a room at the former Candlelight Motel on Bennet Ave., clothing and shoes thrown everywhere. I have such crazy memories of nights spent on Pacific Ave, in the days when the brick mall still existed, hitting all the clubs on the strip and stopping at Romeo's for a slice of white pizza at 3:00 in the morning. This was back in the late 80's and early 90's when all the hair bands were playing at clubs like The Oasis and The Playpen.

In February of 2002, my dream came true and we purchased our own piece of Wildwood! Blessed with a small inheritance from a treasured great aunt and uncle, my mom and I (with my husband's blessing) purchased our home on Glenwood Ave. I have to say the day we signed those papers was one of the best days ever!! The house wasn't pretty but it was ours! It had been vacant for over 4 years and needed a lot of work. At some point, someone had gutted it to the studs but we all chipped in and worked furiously to have the house habitable by summer. We finished just in time for Memorial Day and that weekend we filled the house with family and friends and celebrated our new home.

Wildwood has always been a part of my life. The meaning has changed over the years but it has been a constant for me and always a source of happiness and wonderful memories. I am fortunate enough to be able to work from home and spend nearly as much time in Wildwood as I do at my home in PA. We have wonderful neighbors, most of who are locals. I have begun to feel a little bit like a local myself, a true honor if you ask me. And by the way, I still hate to leave.



Lisa Graeff in Wildwood by-the-sea, 1965



Lisa Graeff on Wildwood boardwalk, 1965



Lisa Graeff and her Pop-Pop, Franklin Wertz Wildwood by-the-sea, 1965



Lisa Graeff and Uncle Woody Wildwood by-the-sea, 1965



Lisa Graeff at the Southwind Wildwood by-the-sea, 1965

The Sun by-the-sea is a bi-monthly paper that debuted in 2004. Over the past eight years, readers have been drawn to The Sun by-the-sea for its colorful design and uniquely Wildwood content. Countless letters from our readers thoughtfully convey our intentions to bring our shore community closer together by sharing Wildwood's great history as well as personal stories. (Feel free to send in your story as Lisa did here!) We protect the hometown feeling our small island inspires.

From one Wildwood lover to another,
The Sun by-the-sea

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