

Remembering. . .

WILDWOOD *and* CREST PIER

By Betty Catanese Elkins



The 2nd Crest Pier 1920-1986

My love affair with Wildwood started when I was a young child. I was born on June 21, 1946 and in August of that summer, I began coming to Wildwood as I would continue to do every summer thereafter until I was nineteen years old.

My parents rented the same house on Hildreth Avenue for our summer vacation for the first few years of my life. Although I was too young to remember, I recognize the house from photos and it is still there today, but the beautiful hydrangeas are no longer there. When I was four years old, my grandparents had a house built on the corner of Cresse and New Jersey Avenues. At the time, I thought it was huge, but was actually quite small by today's standards. Looking back, I probably imagined the house to be so big because it was always filled with people, mostly family members. I can remember my mother and I taking the train, from Philadelphia, which went over the Benjamin Franklin Bridge and traveled along New Jersey Avenue leaving us off right by my grandparents house. We would come down for the entire summer right after school let out and we didn't go back to Philly until the day after Labor Day. During this time, my parents bought a motel, the Rainbow Court on Baker Avenue, although we continued to live at my grandparent's house. The Rainbow Court is no longer there but close friends are living in a condo which is in the exact spot where it used to stand.

One of my oldest memories is going to the children's dance at the Crest Pier on Wednesday nights. My mother would dress me in something frilly and off I went to do the Bunny Hop, Mexican Hat Dance and, of course, the Alley Cat. Oh, how I looked forward to those dances. I eventually grew out of that stage, but found myself back at Crest Pier when I was a young teenager. Back then, in addition to the ballroom, the Pier had a luncheonette/ice cream parlor and an arcade which also had a few bowling lanes. I hung out with my summertime friends for hours, which included local kids from Wildwood Crest as well as kids from Philly, New York and North Jersey. I couldn't wait to get back to the shore and Crest Pier after the school year ended to reconnect with my summer friends who I saw only a couple of months a year.

When I wasn't hanging out at the Crest Pier, I'd be working at one of my summertime jobs, the first of which was a novelty store on the boardwalk, where I impatiently watched the clock waiting for my shift to end and listening to my boss sing "My Time is Your Time" by Rudy Vallee. Needless to say this wasn't one of my favorite jobs. I also worked in the shoe department of Murphy's 5 & 10 which is now a vacant building on Pacific and Wildwood Avenues with the name The Great Whale (a business that occupied the building after Murphy's) still on it's marquee. My favorite place of employment was the restaurant at Sinn's Dock where we stood outside and attempted to lure the customers away from



BETTY CATANESE, HILDRETH AVE. WILDWOOD CREST, N.J. 1948

Kurtz's which was on the other side of the street. I imagine I liked this job best since I worked with two of my best friends as we watched the cute boys who worked on the Pink Flamingo, one of the two major sightseeing boats at the time. At some point, my dancing progressed to the Twist and Bristol Stomp at Starlight Ballroom. Another favorite pastime was hanging in a booth with my friends at Snuffy's. I have so many fond memories of other places in the Crest such as Sea Snack at Cresse Avenue and the beach and Shuman's Restaurant. Other than Crest Pier, none of these establishments exist today. It was especially hard to see Snuffy's close after so many years.

Of course, there was always the beach and the boardwalk. There were so many fun times spent at both places when I was a young child and then as a young teenager. I never tired of the beach even when I had small children and had to lug all the necessities through the sand. Today I can spend an entire day sitting on a chair in the sand and reading a book. The boardwalk is fun at any age. It's actually one of the places that stirs up some of the best memories of my childhood and my daughter's childhoods. Every summer I look forward to taking my grandchildren to the boardwalk and seeing their excitement which I still feel when I walk the boards or ride my bike in the off-season. No matter how old I get, I doubt whether I'll ever tire of the boardwalk with all the activity and tantalizing smells of pizza (love both Mack's and Sam's), Curley's fries, waffles and ice cream and all the other good eats.

Well, the fun of spending summers at the shore finally came to an end. It was time to settle down to real life. I got married to a wonderful guy and had three beautiful daughters. Naturally, we came to Wildwood on vacation every summer and I began taking my daughters to Crest Pier on Wednesday nights. However, after a couple of years, they no longer wanted to put on dresses and hop, hop, hop. We did continue to vacation in Wildwood Crest where my girls spent time with their cousins and also grew to love the shore. After my children were grown, we all rented a house together for the entire summer, coming down on weekends and vacations. We did this for three years and during this time we introduced my first grandson to the beaches of Wildwood Crest.

We bought a house in the Crest in 1997 and my dream of never having to leave the island became a reality in 2003 when my husband and I retired. I'm still going to the Crest Pier, but I'm no longer dancing, bowling or eating ice cream sundaes; however I am still hanging out with friends playing mah jongg there twice a week. I also have my hair done at the beauty salon on the Pier and watch my grandson play summertime basketball in the gym. Crest Pier has always meant good times and it continues on today. For this reason, I chose to have a very special bench placed there in memory of one of the people in my life who loved Wildwood more than me. I am grateful for the memories Wildwood and Crest Pier have given me.



The 2nd Crest Pier, different view. Courtesy of Wildwood Historic Museum



CRESSE AVE., WILDWOOD, N.J. MAY 1954



BETTY ON BOARDWALK, WILDWOOD BY-THE-SEA, N.J. 1958



BETTY WITH SUMMER FRIENDS, HEATHER RD. BEACH 1961