



**“And on earth, peace & good will towards all men.” “And that is what Christmas is all about Charlie Brown.”** Linus



Lauren & LouAnn  
Christmas 1980



## The Bestest Gift

BY LOUANN CATANOSO



Still the bestest gift ~ Lauren, 2009



LouAnn & Anthony with Santa  
Dec. 22, 1962



Lauren & LouAnn, 1981



Lauren & LouAnn, Mom's birthday, June 6, 2000



LouAnn's Shower, July 1979.  
Lauren's a twinkle in her mother's eye!

'Christmastime is here.' Is it just me, or does 'Charlie Brown's Christmas' theme song tug at everyone's heart strings? When I was little, Santa and his helpers would visit every grade school child's home in North Wildwood the week before Christmas. He traveled by fire engine and the anticipation of his arrival was heightened with each sound of the siren.\* My mom always prepared a little something special for Santa and his elves; and us kids were happy to receive that one special gift, and get a photo with Santa Claus. I'm proud to say, my dad, Charlie, was a volunteer fireman for over 50 years, and, he was in charge of this project for several years back then.

As I got older, Christmas started to take on new meanings. I no longer got up at sunrise on Christmas mornings to open my gifts; instead, I savored the extra hours of sleep. During high school (in the early 70's) Christmas vacation meant 'days off from school,' holiday parties, and competitive local basketball tournaments. And Christmas would not have been complete without 'midnight mass' at St. Ann's Church, which actually took place at 9pm on Christmas Eve.

But, the true meaning of the holiday for me, didn't come until I was pregnant, in 1979, at the age of 24. I was given 'the bestest gift ever'~ my daughter, Lauren. From the age of twenty one, 'all I ever wanted for Christmas,' was a little girl. In my youth, I never dreamed anything could top my 'Thumbelina' doll from childhood, or 'slow dancing with that special someone' to the song, "That's the Way of the World," by Earth, Wind & Fire at the old

Rendezvous Club. Little did I know.

One of my favorite Christmases took place when my daughter was in high school. I had been out for a few hours one night, and upon returning home, I actually drove right past my house. I didn't recognize it. It looked as though Clark Griswald (from the Christmas Vacation movie) had come and decorated my house; only it looked 'pretty.' As I sat in my car crying (because it looked so beautiful) I wondered, "who did this?" "Was it my brothers, my father, my boyfriend, my neighbors?" When I got to my front door there was a note hanging on it. The note read, "Merry Christmas Mommy. Love, Lauren". And then I cried again. It never occurred to me that my teenage daughter (and her friend Christy) had literally hung out of my second story windows, in the frigid weather, in the dark, stapling lights to our house.

Now, as my daughter and I are 'maturing together', and are also best friends, as well as mother and daughter, Christmas has yet another meaning; "family, family, family." Our whole family spends two solid days together. It is both insane, and glorious. It's Christmas Eve at brother Joe's, Christmas brunch at brother Chuck's, and Christmas dinner at sister Cathy's or brother Anthony's. New Years Eve is always spent at brother Billy's house. It can't get any better than this for me.

My holiday wish for everyone is simply this; "PEACE."

Dedication: This story is dedicated to my daughter Lauren; a strong, independent woman, whom I admire, and am very proud of.



Lauren & her cousin Brooke, 1984

\*Santa still visits every grade school child in North Wildwood on a fire engine and still gives them each a special Christmas gift.