



**"The moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out."** ~James Baldwin



## The 1960's *Mid-Town Unit*

by Al Love

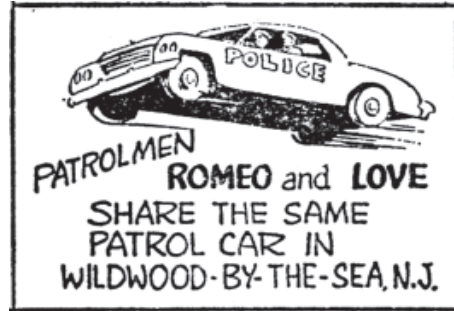
After two frustrating years away at college followed by a three year hitch in the Army, I returned to Wildwood in time for the 1963 summer. What will I do now? I was 24 years old and ready for a real job. But what?

Sitting on my front porch with my good buddies Ritchie Snyder and Frankie Breslin we talked it over. Frankie said he would talk with his Uncle Harry Breslin who was a lieutenant on the Wildwood Police Department. They joked that maybe I could work on the playgrounds keeping the kids in line or working at the Information Center on the boardwalk helping parents find their lost children.

Two weeks later I was summoned to City Hall which was located on Pacific Ave and Montgomery at that time. It burned down a month later. I filled out an application, and received an interview with Chief Anthony Fulginiti. Soon after I was hired. Three weeks later I was issued two summer police uniforms, a whistle, ticket book, a badge, and a .38 caliber Smith & Wesson with real bullets. O my God what am I getting into? I went to a shooting range with the other young men and we shot our guns at targets. Lt. Breslin welcomed 15 young men from several states, sworn us in, and informed us we were provisional officers and were being assigned to his Mid-Town Unit. Some would ride in patrol cars with regular full timers. We all had one week of on the job training with regular officers. We were not Special Class #1 or Class #2 officers. What did we all have in common? We were all young men attending college, just graduated from college, or employed as teachers with the summers off. I myself had completed two years of college and was a veteran. We had common sense and a clean background. Some of the guys had already worked a few summers and were getting close to starting their professional careers.

You have heard many times the stories of Wildwood in the hey-day of the 50', 60's and early 70's. If you hadn't, pick up the Sun By The Sea and read the issues of the memories of people who have lived or visited here during those times. It is impossible to describe the center of town in this story. It was the Las Vegas of the East. Every big name entertainer at the time had their name on a marquee, bright lights, neon signs blinking, excitement, music blaring out the front doors, lines forming down the street to get inside a club.

We controlled this crowd and kept order in the center of town which included New Jersey Ave to the boardwalk and Oak Ave to Spicer Ave. Schellenger Ave was the hub of the action. The Mid Town Squad worked seven days a week from 8pm to 4am under the command of Captain Breslin. He was a no nonsense guy, tough as nails, well respected by the guys, and a local legend in town. Breslin



Above cartoon was discovered by Al in a Ripley's Believe it or Not Book

had attended Wildwood High and was a star athlete in his day.

We became a close knit group and covered each others back. We all had our assigned beat passing the clubs on foot and had to check in at a callbox every hour. We did not have radio communication as part of equipment in those days. We had a whistle system we used, short and long blasts to indicate trouble or to enter the intersections to stop traffic and allow emergency vehicles to get to their destination. There were the occasional fights, drunks, and disturbances, but considering the volume of people in one small area nothing considered major crime.

We became familiar with entertainers, bar tenders and bouncers in town and played them in weekly afternoon softball games at Fox Park. One memorable game that I remember well is when the female singer of the Platters tagged me out going into second base. I had to live with that the whole summer. But the big stars wanted some fun games and we were happy to oblige them.

I would like to mention some of the groups that played as house bands throughout the summer. They included, the McGraw Brothers, the High Hopes, Soul Survivors, Sal Massie (Sr), Georgie Young and Rockin Bocs, Cookie Jar and the Crumbs and at the Shamrock playing the piano for over 20 years Jim Bolger. The Shamrock had 7 draft beers for a dollar and most of the younger set started their night there. At the end of each summer the lifeguards led by a young Lou Cirelli did their annual drinking tour of the bars starting at the Shamrock. We were pre-warned and we kept our eyes on them that night. I still tell Captain Lou Cirelli 48 years later what a pain in the neck those guards were on Labor Day night. I probably also chased George Anderson and his P&O Avenue Boys off their corner a few nights then also.

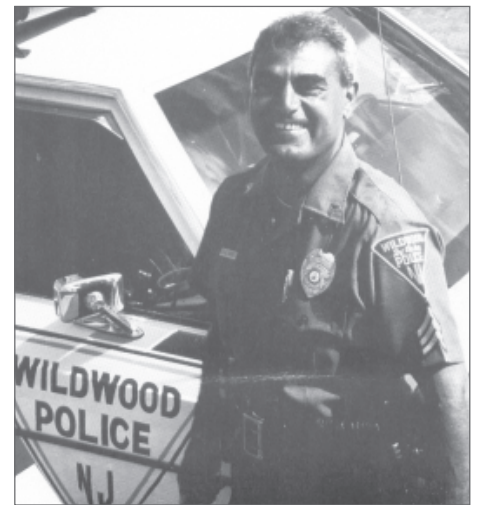
Well the night club scene started to fad in the 70's when the casinos opened in Atlantic City. The entertainment left, the neon lights went out, the streets were empty, the clubs started to be boarded up and later torn down. The Mid Town Squad was a thing of the past and never formed again. The memories of all the guys working together will never be forgotten, they were the best summers of our lives.



1st row from left; Barry Hoffman, Bobby Gilbert, Gerry Gladkowski, Ernie Odgers 2nd row from left: John Scarpata, Rich Goodkin, Jimmy Driscoll 3rd row: from left Walt Cottman, Pete Zenakes, and Dirk Gross.

The guys went on to become lawyers, teachers, principals, doctors, college coaches, an FBI agent, and other professional careers. For myself I retired after 28 years as a State Investigator for the Division Of Gaming Enforcement (DGE). So I guess that decision in 1963 started my career toward law enforcement. We had a few reunions in Wildwood. The last one was about 15 years ago. The reunions also ended in time as we got married, had grandkids and spread out over the country.

There is a plaque in memory of one of our Mid-Town guys Pete Zenakis and is located on his old beat. The plaque with his name and dates was placed in the pavement of the NW corner of Schellenger and Atlantic. We wanted something there to remember Pete and those years of our lives. Pete worked four summers in Mid Town, then landed a federal position in Washington, DC. Five years later Pete died of cancer. He was a good smart officer, a fun loving guy who we all respected. The first Mid Towner to pass away. We dedicated that plaque to him. This is for you Pete.



Officer Romeo



Officer Love



Pete Zenakis Memorial Plaque as it appears outside of the Schellenger Restaurant on Atlantic Ave.



1st Row L-R: Lt. Harry Breslin, Neil Dowling, Bobby Gilbert, Jim Hogston 2nd Row L-R: Pete Xenakis, Ray Loftus, Jim Guidice 3rd Row L-R: George Hagopian, Bernie Baylor, Al Love