



"It is a fine seasoning for joy to think of those we love." ~Moliere



Al's First Winter in WILDWOOD by-the-sea

by Al "Butch" Love

Al at his summer home in the winter.
(This is a more recent picture)



I can relate when I hear people talk about how long they have been coming to Wildwood or how long they have owned their summer home.

My family has owned our summer home in Wildwood since 1912, the year the City of Wildwood was incorporated. My grandparents, James W. Love and Catherine Love, purchased our home on August 11, 1931. My grandfather died in 1933. My grandmother Kate transferred the house to my parents Alex and Anna Love in 1935. It was turned over to me and my family in 1999.

Growing up, Grandma Kate and I were always close. I was her first grandson. She bought me my first Easter suit. She also nicknamed me Butch, a title that would stick with me for many years growing up and something only a few close friends still call me. She was a very feisty woman. On Saturdays, we often went into Philadelphia on the trolley to see a movie on Market Street. Then we would eat at the Horn & Hardart coin operated cafeteria where a few nickels could get you a sandwich, a drink, and a piece of their pie. .

I really enjoyed my summers in Wildwood with my friends and family, spending time at the beach, boardwalk, attending dances at the Starlight Ballroom, crabbing and fishing, and playing baseball at the parks. I also had an array of summer jobs during this time. Summer brought warmth, suntans and happy days with friends. But the summer of 1956 ended and hence, my story begins.

In 1956, I graduated from high school in Philadelphia and had no plans whatsoever after that except to spend summer in Wildwood again. The summer was over too soon and Labor Day was here. In the 1950s, all the summer resident owners and visitors closed up their home, packed their cars, and headed out of town on Labor Day. Schools were starting, vacations were over and everything closed up on the boardwalk and in town.

The traffic out of town on Rio Grande Avenue and N. Wildwood Blvd. was bumper to bumper. The stores on the boardwalk were boarded up for the winter and the bars in town had their last call. The signs went up: See You Next Summer, Thanks For A Great Season.

My grandmother, who lived with us in Blackwood, NJ, and I agreed to spend more time together at our summer home. The weather was still nice and we had no plans back home. It was a strange feeling to watch my parents, sister and two brothers drive away up Glenwood Avenue without us. At that time I did not know that I would spend the whole winter

here with my Grandmother Kate. I was seventeen and she was seventy-six. What a pair!

I had worked that summer in the kitchen at Jackson's Coffee Shop on Oak and Pacific Avenue owned by Jack Bickel and decided to keep working there so I could have spending money. My friends, Richie Snyder and Frank Breslin, who were seniors at Wildwood High, also worked at the coffee shop. They were both on the football team and I would go watch them play at the old Maxwell Field on Saturdays. I also attended the basketball games at the school.

The fall in Wildwood had a crisp feel to it and everyone felt energized. Everybody seemed to know each other. The stores were still open during the day. There were people walking, jogging, and riding bikes on the boardwalk. I had bought my first surf board at Scoops Taylor's Sporting Goods Store on Rio Grande and New Jersey Avenue. Scoop was the Crest Lifeguard Captain at the time and owned the store with Curt Simmons, who pitched for the Phillies. It was a long board, over 11 feet long. I still have it. I surfed the waves on Glenwood Ave up to Thanksgiving Day. No wet suit.

My social life revolved around my new friends who attended the high schools in Wildwood. If someone owned or borrowed a car it was for cruising along Pacific Ave, after school, after football games, or on weekends. It was sort of like the movie, American Graffiti. I'd stop at the Tom Cat Restaurant or Snuffy's for cokes and hamburgers and mingle with other kids.

The days got colder and darkness came earlier. Winter was here. The local business owners mostly closed up and headed to Florida for the winter months. Our house was a summer bungalow not built for year-round living. The heat came from a small oil heater in the center of the living room. The rest of the house was cold. We were the only ones living on our block. There were not many people who lived in the Wildwoods during the 1950s.

After dinner, my grandmother and I settled into our games of checkers, monopoly, and scrabble. Most times the television was useless as we had an antenna on the roof and the pictures always faded away. It was a bitter cold winter but we were determined to make it as we looked forward to the spring. We talked at length most nights as she filled me in on our family origin.

The spring finally arrived and the weather got warmer. People start arriving to check their homes and get ready for the summer season. The town came alive. Summer finally arrived and Grandma Kate and



Al's grandmother Kate, sitting at her home in Wildwood with her two sons, Al's father Al, right, and his Uncle Jim Love.



Al's grandmother
Catherine Love with her two
sons, Al, right, and Jim, left



Al's grandfather
James Witherow Love
March 3, 1874 - Oct. 18, 1933

I had survived! My friends and family returned and it was happy days are here again!

Summer ended and I left for college for two years, followed by three years in the Army. Grandma moved back home to Blackwood and kept correspondence with me as I traveled around the world from base to base.

The Army base was looking for a lifeguard on weekends to guard the soldiers swimming in the Black Sea. Since I had a Red Cross life savings badge from a college course, I qualified. There I was, sitting on a jeep with a whistle watching about fifteen guys swimming alongside farmers who were washing their water buffalos. Let's just say it was not like Wildwood's beach!

I could expect a letter from Grandma at least three times a month, with a little prayer and family news. Stationed in Turkey, I looked forward to a letter from Grandma Kate.

With about three months to go before my tour would end, the letters from Grandma Kate stopped coming. Soon after I received a letter from my mom informing me that Kate had died in her sleep at the age of eighty two. She had a good life and I missed her but our year in Wildwood together will never be forgotten. She was special to me. A lesson there is always give your loved ones a kiss and hug before you leave home.

There remains an old wooden cane in her bedroom closet at the shore as a reminder to me that she is always there looking after me. Even after fifty-six years since My First Winter In Wildwood.