



"No good thing is pleasant to possess without friends to share it." ~Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 B.C.-A.D. 65) Philosopher

Glory Days

The 'Bad News Bears' had nothing on us. We were bad. Well, we started out bad anyway. Over the span of a few years we improved dramatically. In the late 70's I joined a women's softball league in Wildwood Crest. Our team consisted of Sandy Glock, Bernie Olson, Mary Vey, Amy and Bianca Russo, Terry Donovan, and myself, just to name a few.

Our team went through our share of coaches, understandably so. The season always started in the spring, and the weather was beautiful for playing early evening games. The league was great. We knew, and were friends with, all of our opponents. Peggy Kelly, Patti Steiger, Maria Mattera, Dot Carano, and Janice Tomlin, gave us a run for our money. But my all time idol was Marie Flacco. She had the most powerful hit in the league back then.

All of her hits were fly balls to the very back of the field. The only thing better than watching her slam those balls, was the fact that I was left fielder, and I was able to run in any direction and catch them. By my own admission, I was not a good hitter; (I blamed it on the fact that I had a tremendous fear of hitting the

pitcher with the ball) but I do believe I may have been the fastest runner in the league, and always managed to get on base, steal bases, and eventually bring in a run.

Marie Flacco and I went on to play volleyball in a Cape May Women's League for years to come. She remains my athletic idol to this day. Whether we won or lost, we always found a reason to celebrate after each game at Russo's Bar and Grande's. In the early 80's the younger girls started joining the league, and it became a little bit too competitive and serious for me, taking the fun out of the game.

Although our team went on to win some championships in those years, my fondest memories remain in the early years, when it was just a bunch of women out to have "a good time." Yes, Mr. Buttermaker would have been proud. ~by LouAnn Catanoso



(left) 1979 Marie Flacco and teammate Joanne Raucci ~ they played for Sea Crest Bakery "Cream Puffs" and later for Crest Appliance

This story is dedicated to the memory of Bernie Olson and Peggy Kelly



RUSSO'S "BAR BELLES" c. early 1980's

Top L-R: Bianca Russo, Bernie Olson, Terry Donovan, Margie Haynes, Amy Russo, Kathy Yecco
Bottom L-R: Mary Vey, Cindy Conant, Sandy Glock, LouAnn Catanoso, Joe Russo, Julie Donovan



Foreground: Peggy Barnes Frenchville, Front: Bobbi-joe Wilson (Morrier), Sandra Hall, Tracey Hall, Kerry (Shorty) Hall, Deb Alexander Cameron Back: Stacey Vey, Bernie Olson Durante, Amy Russo, Bianca Russo, Jim Carroll, Teri Donovan Santaniello, Jill Mauger, Elaine Barkus

Joe Russo recalls other names of team members as we were publishing this story: Loryn Deane, Elaine who used to bartend at the Elks Club, who was named Team Captain because she knew that a softball was at least bigger than a baseball! Tracey, Kerry, Teri and Lisa Shultz, and of course Ann Connor who had a special way of stopping the line drives!!

The Empty Lot

by Joe Russo



Photos by Joe taken in February 2009

I was warned not to go there and I did not listen. "You don't want to see it," people said (which was an obvious sign sent to protect me). But I ignored it because I wanted to see it for myself, to know for sure that it was really gone. Thus, I came to a stop on Park Boulevard, got out, and leaned against my truck for a minute while I processed the sight of the empty lot across the street. Nothing remained but three support beams sticking out of the ground, a stark reminder of what used to stand there. After taking a couple of pictures for posterity I debated: should I walk around it, or was this good enough?

My morbid curiosity got the better of me. I stepped onto the lot, rather, onto the dusty slab of terrazzo, which was all that remained of a dining room that bustled with activity all of my life. How many times did I walk across it in various capacities-family member, dishwasher, busboy, cook, bartender, and patron? Now it was cut in half, chopped off at the east end, and I stood at the edge and looked over, as if on a cliff. I spotted a chunk of the terrazzo protruding out of the dark sand and stooped to pick it up. Turning it around in my hand, I thought about pocketing it, but instead returned it to its previous resting place.

"Don't you want to save a piece," said a voice behind me.

Startled, I turned to see a man standing behind me, dressed in khaki pants and shirt, with the sleeves rolled up, revealing muscular arms. He was older, of medium height, and deeply tanned, which suggested to me that he was someone who enjoyed working out of doors. His features bore a striking resemblance to my own.

"What did you say?"

"Don't you want to save a piece," he repeated.

"What for," I said. "I didn't even want to come here in the first place."

"Why not?" he asked. "This place was a part of you for a long time."

"I know. That is what made it so hard, but I knew that I needed to come here."

He took a step toward me. "And what do you think, now that you have seen it?"

"It's all very surreal, to tell you the truth. It looks so small now, but back then, it was spacious, with crowds all the time and laughter and a lot of hard work. What was here,

on this spot where we are standing now? Was it my favorite booth, the round table where 'the help' used to eat before work, or both? So many memories torn down and tossed into a dumpster! I'm really sorry I came here."

The old man put his hand on my shoulder and said, "You're looking at this all wrong. "Do you know that I saw this empty lot once before?"

"When?" I asked.

"Around nineteen twenty-one," he said as he drew a deep breath of air. "Wildwood reminded me of my home in Italy along the Adriatic coast. It wasn't as densely populated back then, it was just a quaint, seashore town, but my brother and I saw opportunity. We knew that when it got hot in the cities in the summer, people would be drawn here, so I moved my family down, bought this lot and built a business."

"And your business prospered for over eighty years, I answered. "That was your legacy." I swept my arm in an arc around the lot. "Now, your legacy is gone."

"No it isn't," said the old man. "Like I said, I had a family. My wife and I raised six children in the house next door. They all worked here and then raised families of their own. We got to see some of our grandchildren go into medicine, law, and education and all of them passed through here at one time or another while going to school. And, many of them stayed and helped to run our business. I like to think of all of them as my legacy. This business was a proud accomplishment, but it's not the only thing I would like to be remembered for."

"I suppose you're right," I finally admitted. "But I am having a hard time understanding why they didn't leave the building alone. Because it contained so much history, why couldn't it have been left to stand as it was?"

"The change was inevitable," he answered, "but it hasn't taken away the history or the memories."

He reached for the piece of terrazzo and placed it in my hand. "Here," he said. "Take this home with you. There is nothing wrong with having some physical memento. You deserve that much. I just want you to remember one thing: the memories- yours and those of the people who loved this place, will endure, and you can visit them whenever you want. The building was nothing but brick and mortar."