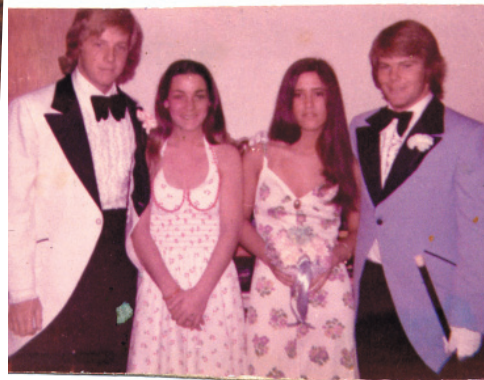


**"If your friends are there then everything's alright."** ~Elton John, Making Friends



1976 LouAnn and Alice at Christmastime



1973 Wildwood Catholic Prom ~ Dennis Flynn, Alice Read Russel, LouAnn Catanoso, Scott Wilson



"Our Kids" Nick, Alicia holding Ryan, Lauren and cousin Carli 1980



1973 Alice & her dad, Frannie Read at work  
Read's Sandwich Shop on the Wildwood Boardwalk



Alice's sons, Nick & Ryan 2001



2000 Alice & LouAnn



2007 LouAnn, Lauren, Alicia, Alice



2005 Alice & LouAnn



Sept. 2008 Alice & LouAnn at Diamond Beach



2007 Alice & LouAnn

**T**his past September, my best friend Alice and I spent a lot of time down the beach together. As we sat on the beach with our sunscreen, and beach umbrella, and "our bathroom" in close proximity, I started daydreaming about days gone by.

I reminded Alice of our Junior and Senior year summers (1972-73) in high school, when we spent every day at the beach. We would waitress till one in the morning at her dad's restaurant on the wildwood boardwalk, (Reads Sandwich Shop) and then go out till three or four in the morning. We would rise (miraculously) in the early morning hours and go straight to the beach. Most of the time we would fall immediately to sleep on our blankets, (no beach chairs back then) and the beach cleaners would just drive their trucks around us. Alice would always bring her little transistor radio, and songs by Cat Stevens, Roberta Flack, Al Green and Bread, danced in our heads while we slept.

These were the days before water bottles, and cell phones. Instead of sunscreen, we would completely coat ourselves with baby oil and iodine, to get the 'best tan.' We always went to Diamond Beach, and we always brought my brothers nine foot surfboard with us. Even though I've never been a swimmer, I wasn't too bad on a surfboard; or so I thought.

I reminded Alice of one day in particular, when she had to leave the beach early to get ready for work that evening. I had off, and decided to stay later and walk home. It was a very hot Saturday afternoon, when I started my long walk back to my house on 19th street. This might not have been so unusual, (as I made that walk many times in my teenage years) but, I was in my bikini, and barefoot, with not a drink in my hand, or a dime in my pocket. (I didn't have any pockets.)

I decided to make the walk on the street, rather than on the beach. I can't imagine why the sidewalks and streets didn't burn my feet off. For some reason when I reached St. Ann's Church, on Glenwood and Atlantic Ave., I decided to go in. I had grown up attending this church, and I guess I just felt welcome.

No one was in the church, and I made my way all the way up front, to the right side, and sat in about the sixth pew. It was very calming, with the sun shining through the beautiful stained glass windows, and the curious shadows being

cast throughout the entire church. I actually said a few prayers while sitting there. All of the sudden I heard some people coming down the center aisle. They didn't seem to notice me. I wanted to get up and leave, but I was afraid of bringing attention to myself. But after about ten minutes, when I heard the organist start playing the "wedding march," I knew I had to get out of there.

I didn't look over to my left to see the bride and groom when I gingerly got up and walked out the side door, bikini and all. I did thank God for that side door once I got outside; and I'm sure I chuckled all the way home. What possessed me to go in that church that afternoon to begin with? I guess it appeared to be an oasis on my long journey from the end of the Crest to North Wildwood.

I also reminded Alice of when we decided to move to Florida after we graduated from high school. We left in mid-August, in my old Chevy, with the stick on the column, and got lost in Cape May Court House looking for Route 47. I can still remember the look on the guys face at the gas station, when we asked him for directions to "Miami."

Over the years a few things have changed. My long brown curly hair has been replaced by very short gray hair; and even though we still carry our backpacks, they now hold wallets filled with photos of our children and emergency contact numbers, instead of packs of Marlboros and strawberry lip gloss. Surfing? I don't think so.

But some things never change. One of my favorite 70's songs continues to be "Rainy Night in Georgia," by Brook Benton, and Radar O'Reilly (from Mash) is still the 'man of my dreams.' More importantly, my friendship with Alice has grown deeper with time. We have been there for each other for the past 36 years now, in good times and in bad. When she and I get together, I'm still that impulsive 17 year old girl that sat innocently (while half naked) in church. And at the same time I'm this 53 year old woman that walks arm in arm with her when I'm unsteady on my feet.

Whoever said the 'love of your life' has to be one of the opposite sex? There is no one else I would rather grown old with. When two people have memories together that span back over decades, it makes you feel like "you're every age you ever were."

**This story is dedicated to the precious memory of Nick Marmello.**