



“Every man’s memory is his private literature.” ~Aldous Huxley



4712 Pacific Ave., Mr. Larry Lillo is seen inside his barbershop cutting a man’s hair, while, Alex, one of the 3 barbers, takes a break outside. Young Larry recalls his father’s motto **“IT PAYS TO LOOK WELL!”** The Lillo family lived above the shop.



Larry’s first cruise along Pacific Avenue



Larry, Sr., Larry Jr. & Ronnie Lillo



Larry on the rooftop deck



4710 Pacific Ave., Larry’s Snack Bar later called Larry’s Luncheonette. Today it is the Holly Beach Train Depot, owned and operated by Larry Lillo, Jr.



4710 - 12 Pacific Ave. Holly Beach Train Depot, 2010



4714-20 Pacific Ave., the original Maggio’s Market



4110 Pacific Ave., Tex’ Luncheonette



4100 Pacific Ave., The Owl & the Pussycat



Memory Lane

by Jessica Westerland



Nostalgia. You don’t even have to be a nostalgic person to suddenly be back in an old familiar memory. Most of the time it is triggered by something out of the ordinary, an old photo, movie, smell or place you haven’t visited in a while. For some people however, a walk down memory lane is right in front of you every day.

Larry Lillo stands behind the counter in his store, the **Holly Beach Train Depot**. He is surrounded by shelves of trains and other models, books and photographs. When he looks outside he doesn’t just see the stores standing there of today, but every store that ever was since his childhood in the 50s and 60s. He remembers it all: fires, floods, fights, fun, and fiascos. Lillo doesn’t have to take a trip or look through old photos to feel nostalgic; simply peering out of the windows is enough to remind him of times when Pacific Avenue was very different, the exact opposite of how it is today.

Today, a drive down Pacific Ave yields views of laundromats, scattered restaurants and small stores, bars, and parking lots. There is very little foot traffic, even in the summer. Mostly the people are walking by with purpose, using the street as a way to get from point A to point B. You don’t usually catch many people aimlessly strolling down the road, wandering in and out of stores, or people driving onto the island just to visit Pacific Avenue. This wasn’t always the way it was.

In the 1950’s and 60’s, Pacific Ave was a hub of activity and life. It was the reason to come onto the island; it was the place to gather. The street was full of thriving stores that would meet any shopper’s possible need, with the store owners and their families growing up and living in the apartments above causing the area to flourish. It was full of kids playing football and tag in lots and in the streets, buying penny candy and sitting at soda counters. Everyone knew everyone else, and if you were a stranger you weren’t for long.

Instead of the smattering of businesses there are today, Pacific Ave once held multiple car dealerships, gas stations, the gas company, electric company, phone company, fire station and police station. It had supermarkets and 5 & 10’s, department stores, boutiques, barber shops, tailors, shoemakers, produce markets, fresh meat delis, restaurants and luncheonettes. There were banks, doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, and liquor stores as well.

According to Lillo, if you walked down the street and tried to see everything, “you could break your neck looking from side to side at all the stores and boutiques.” There was no need to hunt and pick around the island to find the stores you needed, all you had to do was walk down Pacific Ave. You could get there by car, train, trolley, bike or foot.

“Pacific Ave used to be a neighborhood, a community,” Lillo said. “It wasn’t just a street, like it is today. There was always a reason to come here, there were always people visiting the stores.”

The Holly Beach Train Depot sits on Pacific Avenue between Andrews and Taylor Avenues. In the 1950’s the same building belonged to Lillo’s father, and used to be **Larry’s Luncheonette**. Across the street their family also owned **Larry’s Barbershop**. There was **Coomb’s Market** on one corner, **Acme** on another, and **Maggio’s Market** on the other. Despite having so many businesses in one area, the economy was good because they all complimented each other. People waiting for food from one place would wander across the street to shop in another. The families that owned the stores all knew each other, and formed a close knit community, including summer visitors that came back every year as well.

Lillo has fond memories of growing up on Pacific Ave. “It was a great place to grow up. In the 50’s and 60’s this is where you wanted to live,” Lillo smiles and laughs. “We lived Happy Days, that show could have been set here. We had the Fonzies’, and Joanies’”

For Lillo, the past is never forgotten. He has an amazing memory, and can look at any building and tell you the history of that building; all of the businesses and the families that owned them from the 50’s until present day. He remembers cruising in cars down Pacific Ave in the evenings, because that was the place to see and be seen. “You would cruise down the Avenue until you turned at the **Hilltop Diner** on Oak Ave, so everyone could see your car, then make a loop and do it all over again.”

Lillo remembers all of his neighbors and old friends; all the way down to the two older ladies that lived on the corner. They had a little terrier that used to carry a brown bag full of fresh meat they purchased, back to their house in his mouth. He remembers the hangouts, like **Nordaby’s**, **Tex’s Luncheonette**, **The Owl and the Pussy Cat**, and **Kelly’s Billiard Parlor**. The corner of Pacific and Oak used to be referred to as P & O, and that was where all the young people would meet up. The Wildwood Recreation center was constantly bustling, with tournaments and games for the young people.

Sharing memories with other people is a wonderful gift, as well as finding someone that shares the same memories as you. Remembering the past keeps it alive and familiar, just like looking out of one of your own windows at the places and things going on outside today.

Jessica Westerland graduated Valedictorian of ACCC in 2007, and went on to Rowan University to graduate in 2009 with a Bachelor’s Degree in Journalism. She is enjoying her first freelance stint with The Sun. She is employed as a teller with TD Bank in Wildwood. You may know her as ‘the girl with the long hair.’

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALICE BONDI SWING
Photos Courtesy of Larry Lillo & Wildwood Historical Society