



"Those who live by the sea can hardly form a single thought of which the sea would not be part."

~Hermann Broch (1886-1951)



When I was a youngster I thought I was the luckiest kid in the world. My grandparents had 3 apartment houses in North Wildwood! As a result, I got to leave the city each year and spend the entire summer at the shore.

Summers down here were like a dream for a young boy - a combination of Disneyland, carnival, island paradise and a little bit of Las Vegas. Every day was spent on the beach and most nights on the boardwalk. In between there was fishing, crabbing, boating, miniature golf, sand lot baseball (there were still lots in those days), and even horse back riding (in the Crest). No worries - never a boring day. Like Bobby's song says "Every days a holiday ..."

The tenants at my grandparents property fell into three categories. There were the Phila. working class families, usually taking apartments weekly. There were the bartenders and waitresses, doubling up in efficiency units for the summer. (You hardly ever saw these people - they mostly worked and slept.) Then there were the show business performers, renting full size apartments seasonally. There were no condos at that time and these large well furnished, comfortable and affordable apartments offered a nice home away from home.

Before the advent of casino era Atlantic City, the nightclubs on the island were numerous and impressive. Wildwood was known nationwide as a Mecca for the entertainment industry. There was Moores Inlet, Club Avalon, Club Lou Booth, Phil and Eddies Surf Club, the Manor, the Bolero, Valentinos, The Beachcomber and many more.

My grandparents were landlords to band musicians, dancers, singers, comedians and at least one movie actor. Some were nationally known or were on their way to being so. Others just had regional recognition and followed the "circuit", moving from town to town as seasons changed and work became available.

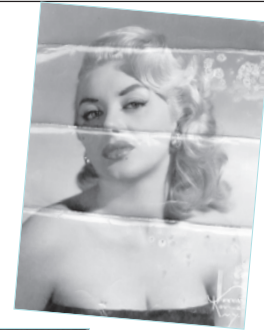
My mother, Nancy, and my Aunt Irma were professional singers as well. They were billed as the "Lynne Sisters" and performed at all of the major clubs along the Atlantic corridor including locally, the original Moores Inlet.

After my aunt retired, my mother continued on her own for many years. She was the "house singer" at the famed 500 Club in Atlantic City as well as Valentinos Supper Club in Wildwood. She worked with all of the top names in her travels, including Eddie Fisher, Dean Martin, Liberace and Charlie Spivaks Orchestra.

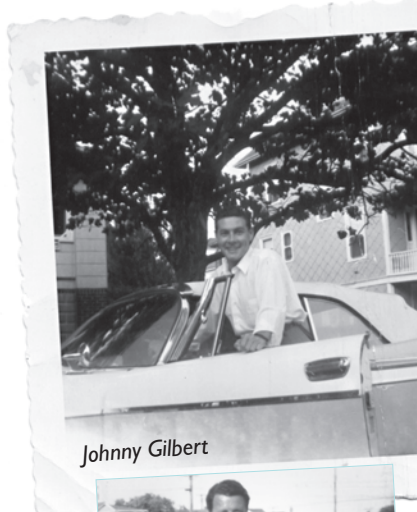
Her theatrical agent was Eddie Suez of Phila. and Wildwood. He had a large and impressive stable of performers as clients, including our own local celebrity hero - Cozy Morley. In fact, Eddie was the original owner of Club Avalon before selling it to Cozy in the 1950's. Nightclub owner Louise "Lou" Booth was also a friend of my mothers.

Summer Home TO THE STARS

by Steve Murray



The Lynne Sisters (l-r)
Nancy Murray and Irma Roma



Johnny Gilbert



Steve's Grandparents rental property which still stands at 223 E. 18th.

Jack Murray, Steve's Dad standing beside Mickey Shaughnessy



Young Charlie Gracie

Because of my mother's show business roots and her close friendship with these three people, they would refer all of their entertainment associates to my family's rental property. Although it was sold over 20 years ago, I have many memories of these celebrity guests from an early age in the late 1950's, until the unfortunate decline of the industry in Wildwood in the late 1970's, due to the casinos "non compete" clause.

I have to say at the start, I never remember any of these folks being anything but nice and down to earth. There was never any snob-bishness and they mixed right in with all of their neighbors. They were even very patient and kind to me, an inquisitive little pest that asked a lot of questions. (A combination of Opie Taylor and Dennis the Menace).

The first "celebrity" I really became aware of at a very early age, was Johnny Gilbert. Johnny began his career as a night club singer and was contracted with a local club for the summer. He recorded a couple of albums but this was not the field in which he would make his mark. His fame would eventually come as a television host and game show announcer, recognized as one of the best in the business.

He began hosting musical themed game shows such as "Music Bingo", "Words and Music", and "Yours for a Song". His big break

came however, when he replaced the great Don Pardo (Sat. Night Live) as the announcer on the original "Price is Right".

After this he worked on the shows "Fast Draw", "Beat the Odds" and finally as long time host of "Dialing for Dollars". In 1973 an even bigger break came when he was hired as the announcer on the "Dinah Shore Show". Anybody who was anybody appeared on this show which remained on the air until 1981.

Finally and perhaps most noteworthy, Johnny has been heard (but not seen) as Alex Trebek's announcer on the hugely popular "Jeopardy" for 20 years.

Shortly after Johnny's stay, we had another guest that was on his way to fame - rock legend Charlie Gracie. Even as a very little kid I thought it was pretty cool to have a rock and roll singer staying with us. (I liked his hip pompadour haircut a lot better than my own crew). Charlie, a Phila. native, is considered that city's first rock star. I can't remember which club he was working at during his stay with us.

He recorded for the Cameo label with whom he released such hits as "Ninety-nine Ways", "Wandering Eyes", "Fabulous" and the mega hit that went gold, "Butterfly". At 4 or 5 I used to lip sync and dance to this in front of the record player.

Charlie was a featured performer in Alan Freed's concerts, the Ed Sullivan Show and Bandstand. He appeared in the rock and roll musical film "Jamboree" and toured with the likes of Chuck Berry, Bo Diddly, the Everly Brothers and Eddie Cochran.

When I got older and really interested in music I realized Charlie was one of the most talented guitar players of that era. This was a much recognized fact by many of the British rockers such as Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Graham Nash, Joe Cocker, Van Morrison and others. They all credited his rock-a-billy sound and guitar work as a major influence on their music. I've heard that he's as big as Elvis in that part of the world.

Charlie is still going strong, touring and recording, and despite his fame, never turned his back on a town that helped to launch his career. He still performs regularly in the Wildwoods every year.

I have many other celebrity stories to relate, especially with another of our famous house guests, actor and comedian, Mickey Shaughnessy. Mickey appeared in over 40 motion pictures including "From Here to Eternity", "Pocket Full of Miracles" and "Jail House Rock". He stayed with us for about 6 seasons and became like a family member. I'll share some personal stories about him in a future article.

Those sure were great times.