



Dorothy Wildwood 1969



Destination... Wildwood by-the-Sea

BY DOROTHY KULISEK

It was the unofficial first day of summer for the McMonagle family on the last day of school. Once the bell rang, the world turned into one long hot summer day. When my brothers and sisters & I got home, our mother would hand out 6 brown paper shopping bags, one for each of us to pack whatever we wanted to bring to the shore for the summer. We all scurried as mom yelled, "We're leaving for the seashore!"

She packed us all in the station wagon, along with the dog, while "See You in September" played on the radio. We waved goodbye to our friends, while we looked forward with unbearable anticipation to the season that awaited us. Mom put on her driving sunglasses, hung her arm out the window, and we were on our way.

Once in New Jersey, Mom pulled over at the first farmers' market to pick up some fresh produce. The girls counted how many licks it takes to get to the tootsie roll in the lollipop; the boys named all the roadkill, and played punchbuggy. We all asked, "Are we there yet?" We knew we were closer when the aroma of salt air seeped through the windows.

We see seagulls and the big neon sign that reads "WILDWOOD" as we turn off at exit 6 and join the long line of cars along Grassy Sound Blvd. heading over the rickety old bridge. One by one we pass the familiar sites: Jim's Clam Bar, Ed Zaberer's, Henri J's, The Shell Shop, Moore's Inlet, the Red Garter, Cozy Morley's, and the pink Lurae Motel as we finally pull up to our little mint green beach house.

The pink & blue snowball bushes are in full bloom and the lawn needs mowing. We hurry to the backyard to find our old Schwinn's, fishing rods and crab traps where we left them last year on Labor Day. The sky is so blue and clear at the shore, the ocean roar is beckoning us to come near. We step up onto the clamshell-lined porch that doesn't have its yellow & white striped awning up yet, and open the old jalousied glass door to breathe the welcoming, seashore scent of our beach home. We make our way passed the mismatched furniture to the pencil lines in the hallway and see how much we grew from last year. We look in our dressers and pull out the musty bathing suits from last summer and we unpack our brown paper "suitcases". The shades are rolled up and the windows are thrown open to let the summer back in. School is a lifetime away and we are in our glory!

"What we remember from childhood we remember forever."



iconic boardwalk photo booth pictures

Our summers at the shore were a little piece of heaven. To Mom, she says they were the best years of her life. Weekdays were spent crabbing and fishing, riding bikes and playing ball, or jumping rope and playing jacks. We always colored or played board games on rainy days. The shore house had no television and it never needed one.

Little seashore cottages were meant to sleep 20 kids or more. That's just how it was back then. Sometimes our Philly friends or cousins would come to visit, or Mom would take us to other beach towns to visit friends. Sometimes she would treat us to a night at the Drive-in movies offshore. We mostly spent our mornings at the beach, afternoons at Sportland Pool and our nights playing on the block or going miniature golfing or playing pinball at the Lurae or the Surfrider Motel game rooms. One evening long ago, while walking home from the ice cream parlor where Maui's is now, my brothers and sisters and I and a couple of friends made up a song. Every now and then we still sing it. . . word for word, sound effects and all. It's imbedded in all of our memories.

Friday nights were special as we looked forward to Dad coming down after work to take us up the boards. On the weekends he loved to take us for rides to Cape May and to his favorite restaurant the Lobster House, or out on our grandparents boat the Leprechaun. In the evenings, our parents would go out to shows and see some of the popular bands playing~ back then Wildwood was all about the music. Occasionally they would even take us along. He and Mom would like to hang out at Moore's Patio Bar with friends while we went to Moore's beach. Pop's Water Ice Truck is a fond memory we all share too. He used to park his truck at Moore's parking lot back then in the early 1970s, before he became a famous Fudgy Wudgy man on the beach.

The house at the shore has been a constant in our family. Our parents may not have realized the investment they were making when they first purchased it in 1968. Some families grow up and grow apart. But the house at 7th St. has kept our family alive ~ growing closer together all of these years. There's no price tag big enough for that.



The McMonagle family at the Lobster House in 1968.



Sharon, 1967
The 'blonde bomb'

Joe & Diane McMonagle on their way out to see Celine Dion on their 53rd anniversary, 2009

Natalie & Joey after the Fishing Rodeo, 1972



The McMonagle family summer home



The McMonagle kids with Butler cousins after the Fishing Rodeo at Otten's Harbor in Wildwood, 1972



The McMonagle's at 7th St. beach in 1972 - Joey, Dorothy, Mikey, Natalie, Jimmy, Mom in the middle

as timeless as the sea and sky. When we reminisce, we are forever young.

This summer, however, brings a new perspective of time with it. Our father's time here with us ended on a cold day this past winter. Every day we miss him dearly. We thank him for his hard work and the sacrifices he made, because he and Mom knew that a beach house was the secret to keeping a family together.

Thank you Dad. Together with Mom, we will continue to treasure what was most important to you... family.

Our parents continued to invest in our family, and in 2007 expanded the house for their growing family, and so that they could retire there. Mom and Dad were blessed to spend 5 golden years together at their 'new' old shore home, enjoying the quiet winters, while looking forward to everyone coming down in the spring and summer. They found new life while relaxing on their porch rockers.

For 44 years, from Memorial Day til Labor Day, our family and friends gathered together in our little home by the sea. Time has aged us, but within our souls, time is



Mom & Dad & their gang