



"Live simply; love extravagantly." ~Anon.

When Bands Were Big *Georgie Latin*

By M.A. Leslie

It all started with a kiss and a song. In 1961, George Latella met his wife, Maryjane on Memorial Day. It could be said that it was a chance meeting, one of fate, but it is better to think that it seems meant to be. Maryjane, better known as Cookie, was at Moore's Inlet watching a young band, The Showboys, with 19-year-old Georgie Latin aka Latella.

Someone in Cookie's group challenged her to be bold and give George a kiss. Luckily, she took the bet and gave him a kiss as he walked off the stage. Later that night, Cookie was invited to sing with the band and that was all it took.

A year later, the pair was married and on their way to a long happy life together. George and Cookie lived in Roxborough (The Northwest part of the city) for most of the year, always coming down for the summer to their shore home in North Wildwood. George worked for 37 years as a music teacher in the Philadelphia school system and Cookie spent 31 years working as the school secretary as well as a reading teacher. George also played with his band in the winter months all over Philly and Jersey. Of course, that was just what they did when it wasn't summer.

When summers would hit, George, would transform back into Georgie Latin and perform as an accordion player in bands at the Jersey Shore. It was what he truly loved to do. He had learned from his father when he was young and joined his first band at the age of 15 in 1957, which he started with band mate Bobby Rydell. It was a time when the clubs of Wildwood would fill with people to watch live music. There were at least 15 to 20 clubs in downtown Wildwood and another dozen or so clubs in North Wildwood. Most clubs had two bands alternating all night with continuous music. All the bands wore tuxedos which gave the town a "Las Vegas" glamour.

The late fifties to the early sixties were a time when music was booming in Wildwood and George was right in the middle of it all. Not only would the town fill with bands, but it also had it's share of celebrities; not that it was all that strange to George who graduated with Chubby Checker and remains friends with him today.

Cookie, also worked over the summers. She spent years working at Cozy Morley's Club Avalon. There, the couple was given a chance to meet the big name musicians as well as hang out with them after the shows. In her time there, Cookie and George were able to meet Jonny Ray, The Winged Victory Chorus, January Jones, Joey Bishop, Haden & Rodgers, Julius Larosa, as well as many more.

Unfortunately, like most things do, the hey-day of the Wildwoods' live music scene came to an end. During the 1970's, the bands that had once filled the clubs were replaced with DJ's. Live music became too expensive and guys like George had to branch out beyond the borders of Wildwood. Instead of giving up on his summer love, he worked up and down the



The Moore's that lives on in our memories



Moore's Inlet Bar 1962 ~ Bud & Doris Moore (standing and seated), Drummer Ernie Dee (back), with George & Cookie (front)

Jersey shore, including towns like Cape May, Avalon, Stone Harbor, Sea Isle City and all the way up to Atlantic City. His last years performing were in the casinos playing for High Roller parties, Cocktail parties and as a strolling accordionist in the dining rooms.

The names on most of the clubs they remember have changed. Some still hold the names they had, but for the most part the Wildwoods that they remember are just memories. That doesn't change one thing, their love for each other and the town that they've been entertaining and coming to for fifty years.

Now, the couple that started with a kiss and a song is celebrating their fiftieth year of marriage and are retired living in Wildwood Crest, following their dream, a year round home by the shore. There they get frequent visits from their family, including their three grandchildren, allowing them to share their love and memories of the shore with a younger generation.



A typical scene at Moore's Inlet Bar



George & Cookie with good friend Bobby Rydell



George & Cookie on their wedding day



George & Cookie on their 50th wedding anniversary