

The Glory of Our Childhood Memories of Stone Harbor, NJ

Nancy Kille Hartsock/Grammy 2021

“I see the tower! I see the tower! I see the tower!” the three little girls chant over and over again! They are wriggling with excitement, packed into their places in the overflowing station wagon - mom and dad in the front seat. The chanting begins as soon as the Stone Harbor water tower becomes visible on the horizon from the boulevard, continues until the welcome sight of the Wetlands Institute to the right, and then! the bridge into the Seashore at It’s Best - Stone Harbor New Jersey! As the car begins to climb, torturously slow due to July traffic, the family begins to count - 1! 2! 3! Upon reaching the control booth at the top of the bridge, the station wagon erupts into clapping and joyful shouts of excitement and joy! They have arrived for their long awaited two week vacation in a place so deeply ingrained in the family’s DNA that they are overtaken and carried by waves of delight and gratitude, similar to the ocean waves they’ll soon ride on rafts and tubes! These weeks will be free of misbehaving - laced instead with fun, cherished activities, and space to breathe - together - as Daddy doesn’t even have to go to work!

They stop at Diller and Fisher to get the keys to their little rental home, arriving as soon as allowed to, everyone helping to carry everything in to set up ‘home away from home’ - a sacred space in which more memories will be made, adding to the treasure trove already accumulated, building on memories of generations gone before.

The girls have been saving all year for this, and one of the first stores on 96th Street they will visit is Wood’s 5 & 10 cent store, where they will purchase beautiful (to their eyes) adjustable rings for 10 cents each, and buckets, shovels and watering cans for the beach. Their first Springer’s ice cream cone of the year is about to cap this perfect day like a cherry on the top of a scrumptious ice cream sundae!

Every day will be filled with trips to the beach, including walks with Dad to look for treasures like beautiful stones (Cape May diamond-like) and shells to paint with watercolors. They'll go miniature golfing, fly kites, and play shuffleboard at the playground on 97th street. They'll go fishing at Edward's pier with bait purchased at what became Smuggler's Cove. In the front of that building is a candy store called Guyon's, where the girls will be able to pick out lots of penny candy, carried in small hands to the car in bulging little brown paper bags. They will climb sand dunes in Avalon, and then jump and roll down onto the beach. They will get to go to the popular bakery, Kohler's, in Avalon for delicious doughnuts one or two mornings too!

One night the family will play together on the Wildwood boardwalk - riding the rides, playing some of the games, and eating sticky cotton candy - all while "Watch the tram car, please" strums in the background like the back beat of a lively song. On rainy days, they'll take bread and crackers to feed the ducks in Cape May where Mommy used to go as a little girl, or play some arcade games on the Cape May promenade.

When the two weeks are over, tears will roll like little waterfalls down the girls' cheeks (and mom's). Dad will nod, understanding, but personifying the gratitude they all feel for more time together in a place anointed, for them, with peace and beauty. In fact, Mom and Dad would retire at Stone Harbor, in a little house on Weber Court. They would truly live "happily ever after" for almost two decades, welcoming many joyfully chaotic family visits, which reinforced the glories of Stone Harbor in the hearts of new generations. Still, the grown girls and their children and their children's children, visit Stone Harbor staying in the little Weber Court home brimming with unconditional love, faith in God, peace, and joy. A bench stands as a permanent part of the Bird Sanctuary, a bench paid for by their children and grandchildren: *George and Shirley Kille, God Is Good*. Two of the three girls have followed the example their parents set and retired to the shore. One more to go!