

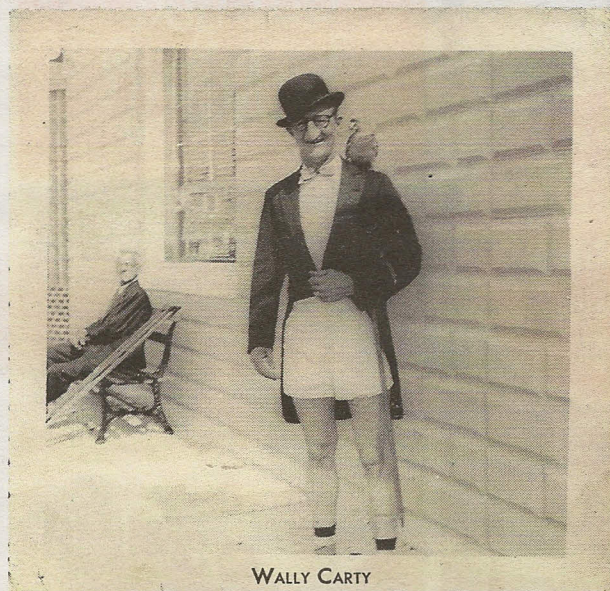


"Best trust the happy moments....The days that make us happy make us wise." ~John Mason

WALLY'S CAFE

~The First of a Series of old Wildwood Bar Stories~

By Josh Kinney



Wally clattered the last two empty mugs and wiped down the bar with a soapy wet cloth. He held the glasses, clear, smooth and familiar, and placed them by the sink with mounted brushes where his young daughter Debby loved to wash the dishes. Dressed in an old army jacket and sporting a fake mustache, he hummed the tune of "When the Saints go marching in" while he finished straightening up. In his mind, he was reliving yesterday when he entered the bar wearing his suit, waving a small American flag and singing the song, leading a marching crowd of fun loving partiers through the bar. Outside, the streetlights flickered on the humid southeast corner of Walnut and Olde New Jersey Avenue as the sun's glimmering morning light began beaming across the mighty Atlantic just a few blocks away.

The parking lots and streets were littered with deep puddles from the previous day's downpour, a blessing in disguise for Wally and his business. An inner tube floated by his yellow 1953 Buick parked on the Walnut avenue side of the building. The day before Wally was wearing a striped bathing suit splashing about in the rain with his kids and friends from the neighborhood.

Michelle, 5, and Wally Jr., 13, barreled through the side door from their upstairs apartment home, their bare feet scampering across the spotless sanded floors, past the phone booth in the lobby and into the main bar area. Michelle swung in a circle around the giant metal pole that stood as a support beam, one in which Wally's youngest, Lori, would climb telling customers it was her birthday so they would sing to her and give her money during her "many birthdays" throughout the summer.

The man who was liked by everyone smiled and made his way over to his kids who had rummaged into the back room with the seven pool tables, couches, and the television. Wally's was one of the only bars to have one at the time. He was meticulous about the building, it was his kingdom, but he was too humble to be a king.

Amidst a thick aroma of crabs and the melodic sounds of clinking silverware coming from the kitchen, the kids ran towards the juke box which played a familiar tune "Cozy hazy crazy days of summer."

RIDDLE: Look at me... I can bring a smile to your face, a tear to your eye, or even a thought to your mind. But I can't be seen... What am I?

Say his name or mention his bar and anyone who lived, worked or visited Wildwood during that time will stop and tell their stories of him. Wally was a real character, a genuine, honest community man who worked diligently, living to take care of his family and make people laugh.

"He was the nicest guy, he'd give you the shirt right off his back," said his daughter Michelle, after years of observing her dad and learning from his fun loving sacrificial lifestyle.

When he passed away in 1978, just five years after selling the bar he originally purchased in 1950, Michelle and her siblings discovered her father's safety deposit box which contained countless IOU's from people dating back to the 50s and 60s. "That's just the way he was," said Wally Jr., "He wasn't tight with his money at all."

In fact, he was always buying people drinks, even in his own bar and half of the time didn't even charge the \$18 weekly room renters above the bar. Wally would walk in every day wearing black pants and a white shirt with the top button undone. During his 18 hour work days, when he wasn't playing dress up and acting silly, this outfit defined his appearance.

Wally was a popular man to be around. "People would always say, 'oh you're Wally's daughter' when I was younger. It made me feel like my dad was a celebrity," said Michelle. In a sense, Wally himself was an icon on the island, and his bar that stood in the midst of the bustling Angelsea bar district was no exception to the notoriety.

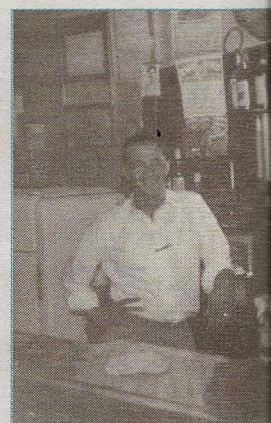
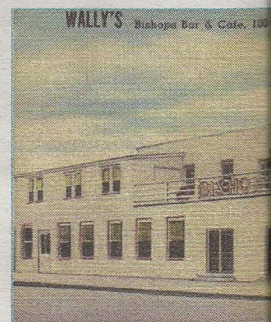
Musical entertainment played a key role at Wally's, especially during Saturday night jam sessions. Bands like The Cellar Doors, a pop group from Glassboro would play from 9 pm to 3 am with only a 40 minute break at 1:40. Singers like Nan Jones, Georgie Shaw and Jimmy McGinny would frequent the bar with impromptu performances. Back then, it was an age of genuine laid back relationships, where all bar owners were friends and would buy rounds for each other's customers. Food was shared and rather than competing, various companies and bars helped each other out. Between the loyal bartenders like Jimmy Bright, Dave Smith and Buddy Kelly, and the regulars at Wally's, were the people who became a huge extended family, some that rented the 18 rooms above the bar.

For 30 cents, customers enjoyed an ice cold mug of beer, a glass for 15 and a shot for 40. The bar was famous for its delicious crabs that were served already cleaned out. Wally's was a barefoot bar with people in bathing suits who came up from the beach for lunch or a drink.

Though the bar's last call came on January 1, 1973, Wally sold his place. The drinking age had been changed to 18 and he didn't want his children growing up in the bar when they were of age, it turned out that it had been his plan from the very beginning, having seen the business from all angles and knowing the stress and strain as well as the good times. During those years, Wally made his family an incredible livelihood filled with priceless memories, but he was an sincere and loyal man of integrity that stayed true to his word.

Gazing into his father's safety deposit box and sifting his hands through the dozens of IOU's, Wally Jr. wiped away a tear. "Dad was such a hard worker," he said, "He gave us kids everything we wanted."

ANSWER: Did you figure it out? It's your memories!



Above photos of Wally