

Joyride III

By Keith Forrest



It has been more than 1,000 days since we turned the key to our family home in Cape May for the last time.

That gray-blue weathered sanctuary of a million memories still commands a piece of Jefferson Street. But I understand these days it has a new life in yellow.

One of my mother's dear friends a few doors down from the old family homestead tells me the new owners love that house dearly.

I haven't been back to Cape May since the day we sold the house back in the spring of 1999.

But the town, and especially the house, have lived in my mind's eye. The Cape May of my mind is one that doesn't respect temporal boundaries. In it, my mother still writes a weekly Joyride column preserving the history of our town and our family for posterity.

But this summer I will mix my nostalgic hug of the past with Cape May as it is now.

My mother's echoes will be our tour guide as bring my 1-year-old son to the town of his father's growing up for the first time. The birth of my first child is one of the many new wonderful things I will bring back to Cape May for a bittersweet trip down memory lane.

A thousand days ago, the last time I laid eyes on Cape May, I wasn't a dad. A thousand days ago I wasn't most of the way through my doctorate at the University of Massachusetts.

A thousand days ago my brother Craig had not yet

graduated from the University of California. These are all things that no doubt have my mother smiling in the afterlife.

And it is my mother's spirit that brings us back to the tiny Victorian town of my youth. I will laugh and smile, and probably shed quite a few tears, as my little boy makes his inaugural crawl up and down Queen Street beach, where we scattered my mother's ashes after her death.

You see she has been lightly dancing above the waves of her beloved beach ever since her passing from this world. This summer my wife, son, and I come to remember what was and to make some new memories.

I will remember a Cape May before the building boom, back when there were open spaces.

In elementary school, my best friend Kevin and I used to maneuver through the marshes behind the water tower every morning on our way to class. They are long gone, swallowed up by a bank and other projects. But they still live in my mind.

I will think about the red-brick Christian Admiral, domineeringly dominating the beach front skyline before it gave way to condos and fancy summer homes.

I will think of begging my mother to let us play mini-golf for a buck, or playing skee ball for a dime.

I will think of the Jetty Beach when it was a sort of wilderness, the true end point of the boardwalk before it, too, became built-up.

I will think of the most amazing donuts I have ever eaten, long sticks of dough bursting with crème from the Seacrest Bakery on Beach Drive next to the movie theater.

The bakery has been gone for at least 15 years. But those wonderful treats still dance on my tongue. I will think of the endless basketball games I played with my buddies in the driveway of the Jefferson Street house.

Games that took their toll on the poor house, breaking each pane of glass in the garage windows ten times over, and reducing our white picket fence to a pile of scrap wood.

I will think of many people and places as I return to Cape May. I will be swallowed up in a pleasant storm of smells and sights.

But mostly I will hear the echoes of my mother. I will remember slamming screen doors (and my mother saying "in or out"), and summer laughter.

But mostly I will remember what an exceptional mother she was, and what a good choice she made raising me in Cape May.

Some things you don't truly appreciate until you have children of your own. So this summer I will travel to Cape May with my family to remember, and to celebrate, and to show my son the town where my mother raised me.

But most of all, I will travel back to say, "Thanks mom for making me who I am."

(ED. NOTE: Keith Forrest (No. 1 Son) and his wife Kris live in Huntington, Massachusetts with Libby's grandson, Kameron. Keith's email address is keithandkris@hotmail.com.)