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SPECIAL-SECTIONS

Lasting memories of first kiss

James Carroll Contributing writer

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The invitation came in the mail a couple of weeks ago. Whatever your age, a seaside wedding — especially in the summer on the Cape — evokes your own romantic memories.

During the summer of 1966, after we had finished the eighth grade, a group of us went on a youth group bus trip. I rode with two of my buddies, never expecting that day to produce a lifetime memory. We were just excited to go to the beach without our parents watching over us; and so, at the age of 13, riding on a yellow school bus, we imagined ourselves the most sophisticated of travelers, as if headed to Monte Carlo with James Bond, intent to impress any girl we saw.

The bus took us to Nantasket Beach and its amusement park. There were other youth groups from different towns there that day. My two friends and I eventually met three girls, and our Breakfast Club for that day's adventures began.

After some cotton candy and a couple of amusement park games of skill, we each found ourselves talking to a different girl. I don't know how that happens, but it just does. Somebody laughs harder at one of your jokes; maybe you catch a smile aimed in your direction. When you're 13, it's not too complicated. When you have your whole life ahead of you, and the biggest decision you have is whether you ride the Ferris wheel or roller coaster next, one girl will get your attention, and for the rest of that day, at least, you're together.

One of the rides was called the Jungle Cruise, and you could describe it charitably as the lost cousin to Pirates of the Caribbean at Disney World. I can see that ride so vividly now, standing in line with her, waiting our turn, as the boats full of screaming passengers plunged down the flume, soaking everyone with water. There on that ride, on that summer's day, she kissed me. I remember her shiny, dark brown hair and white smile, her giggly voice, the taste of peppermint, holding hands afterward, and the smell of salt air from the beach.

Her name was Carrie; she wrote it on a piece of paper with her phone number that she gave me before she left on a different bus, headed home. I called her several times after that memorable day from a phone booth in the drugstore. We had long conversations about topics I can no longer recall, but I'm sure they seemed important then to both of us. As that summer progressed and the start of high school approached, different events took my attention and hers. The calls became less frequent, and eventually, like so many other things in life that have a beginning and an end, they stopped. I never saw her again after that day, but I will never forget that first kiss.

Time's passing can erode some of life's details, but how old you were and where you were when you had your first kiss is not one of them. You fondly remember who you were then and not what you are today. And for me, it started with that wedding invitation that came in the mail.

— *James Carroll lives in East Falmouth.*