

SAGA OF THE YOUNG RUFFNERS

Elisabeth F. Ruffner

Photo caps 1) Marriage of the lovers, 233 Park Avenue, Prescott, Arizona August 10, 1940.

2) Lester Ward "Budge" Ruffner and Elisabeth Friedrich Ruffner – newlyweds at Mt. Charleston, US Army Air Corps rest camp, outside of Las Vegas Nevada, 1944.

( I suggest the photos be separated 1) at the top and 2) at the bottom or somewhere near the end of the piece.) (If there's a minister in the photo, it's Episcopal Priest Marsall Travers)

When a college girl falls in love, and the feeling is mutual, but hundreds of miles separate the lovers, what is she to do? He has enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps, to await the call of his country, and she has a year of college to finish, to say nothing of her duties as chairman of her sorority's fall rush season. The young graduate of the University of Cincinnati's College of Embalming, where he had met the Cincinnati sorority girl in the medical school in which both were taking classes, had returned to his home in Prescott to continue working in the family business, the Ruffner Funeral Home, and she in Cincinnati that summer, has an affair of the heart to which to find a salubrious solution.

It's June 1940, Mercy Hospital in Prescott has been lost to a fire, with no lives lost, but the Ruffner ambulance service mightily engaged in moving patients to various and sundry nursing homes and hostels. The country is rushing headlong to war, but the trains are running so she plans the trip of her young life, with her mother, from Cincinnati to Prescott, to meet her fiance's family.

The the tall, blonde city girl steps off the Santa Fe Chief, the super passenger train of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company, in a white sharkskin suit and navy and white spectator heels, to be greeted by the Ruffner family. Even before meeting the travelers, the young man's father leans over to whisper in the sister's ear "He's a goner"!

Many more meetings filled the next few days, and the lovers' commitment to each other grew stronger, to the extent that the girl's widowed mother was approached by the young suitor to ask her daughter's hand in marriage. An appropriate wedding dress was found, the home of the family was readied for a small family service followed by luncheon, and the newlyweds left on a wedding trip to the Indian country with a single sleeping bag and a coffee pot for ten days of adventure.

Although the city girl had never slept out of doors in her life, her sensibilities were soothed with a couple of nights at the Grand Canyon, and a returning weekend with the young trader Richardson family at Cameron Arizona in a rooftop suite with a square, very capacious bathtub!

Soon Uncle Sam's call was answered and the young groom left for more than three years of service in World War II, all within the continental United States. One of the best assignments was at the air base at Las Vegas, Nevada, and the newlyweds were reunited there several times when the gas ration coupons were pooled sufficiently for several Prescott women to drive from Prescott to Las Vegas to visit their loved ones.

Life does go on, and the young Ruffners with their baby daughter, Melissa, were reunited in Prescott in 1945, where Budge continued in the family

business and Elisabeth, after working for a group of physicians during the war years, resumed her life of volunteerism and raising the family of two more Ruffners, Rebecca and George, to continue the long and distinguished line of this family in Arizona.

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