

The Muni Opera

Jeannette and I dated for about three years before we were married in 1965. I figured that we had about 3 dozen dates during that time and wrote about 100 letters to each other. I highly recommend to those who are dating to consider writing letters or emailing each other frequently during their dating period. It's a great way to get to know each other. When in each other's immediate presence it's sometimes harder to say or ask important things about each other. Writing allows more thought to be put into the conversation and can sometimes be easier. At any rate, we got to know each other intimately without the danger of too much intimacy.

One of our favorite activities in the summer when we dated was to go to the Municipal Opera at Forest Park in St. Louis. The Muni, as it was affectionately called, featured popular musicals like *Around the World in 80 Days*, *My Fair Lady*, *Oklahoma*, *South Pacific*, and *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Invariably we had to contend with rainy or showery weather when attending the outdoor productions. I think it probably rained on all but about a half dozen of our dates during those three years.

I borrowed my dad's car for dates most of the time. I even taught Jeannette how to drive using the old 1955 red Ford station wagon. Eventually, after Jeannette graduated from Jewish Hospital and got a job at Christian Welfare Hospital in East St. Louis she bought her first car -- a blue Pontiac Tempest. However, I owned a small motorcycle for about a year during the time we dated before she had a car. The engine on my motorcycle was so small its top speed was about 50 mph and it was 200 miles to St. Louis from Rolla where I attended the University of Missouri. It took over four hours to ride from Rolla to St. Louis and the vibration from my bike deadened my legs so badly it took about half an hour to be able to walk normally again after I dismounted.

I showed up a few times at Jeannette's house on my motorcycle with a leather jacket and a full beard which I was growing for the St. Patrick's Day celebration in Rolla. I'm sure her mom thought deeply about letting Jeannette leave the house with me. One time her mom had good reason to be concerned. We rode my bike North along the east side of the Mississippi River from St. Louis to the

Pierre Marquette State Park near Afton, Illinois. We left in mid-afternoon on a beautiful drive, but, coming home it began to rain and get dark. By the time we were half way to her house we were soaked to the skin. It didn't look like the weather was going to improve, so I offered to find a motel for the night. Of course, Jeannette had no intention of spending the night in a motel with a member of the Hell's Angels, so we stopped at a laundromat to dry our clothes. Jeannette removed her blouse and jeans in the bathroom in the back of the laundromat, handed them to me through a crack in the door, and waited while I dried her clothes. Then we changed positions and I waited while she dried mine. It reminds me of the old movie with Carol Lombard and Clark Gable entitled, *It Happened One Night*. We finally arrived home about 9:00 p.m. thoroughly soaked once again. Her mother was fit to be tied by that time, but she graciously accepted our explanations.

Jeannette and I went to the Muni or the movies on most of our dates. The Muni, located in Forest Park, is a large city park in St. Louis, like Central Park in New York City. The park contained the famous Zoo designed by Marlin Perkins; the Jewel Box, a glass arboretum; the Art Museum; many beautiful lakes; and the Muni, an outdoor theater. Many of these structures were remnants of the St. Louis World's Fair held in the park in 1904.

During the '60s Cinemascope movies were very popular. They were large-format movies shown in exotic theaters like the Fox or the Paramount. We saw movies like *Dr. Zhivago*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *How the West Was Won*. We also enjoyed standard movies like *The Pink Panther* and *Charade*.

One of the unique features of the Fox Theatre in St. Louis was a short organ recital before each feature movie by Stan Kann, the organist. He would play a flowery selection of music that filled the theater with deep rumbles and towering arpeggios of sound. To make his performance even more dramatic, he was framed in a spotlight as doors opened in the center of the stage. He and his organ were then lifted from the orchestra pit to above the stage by a hydraulic platform for the performance and then returned to obscurity as the movie began.

My favorite memory of dates with Jeannette was having dessert at Cyrano de Bergerac's on Clayton Boulevard west of Forest Park. You remember Cyrano, don't you? He was one of the Three Musketeers with the big nose? Our favorite

place to go at the end of a date was to this ice cream shop in the basement of a building adjacent to Concordia Lutheran College and Seminary. Students from the seminary earned extra money on weekends waiting tables in this little French style bistro.

We always had the same dessert--Cherries Jubilee. It's a bowl of vanilla ice cream, melted slightly, with a large serving of hot cherries and a special sauce. The dessert was prepared at the table by heating the cherries and sauce in a skillet over an open flame. Brandy was poured into the sauce and ignited to produce a blue flame over the pan until most of the alcohol had burned off and then poured over the ice cream. Uhm! Good!

On our twenty fifth wedding anniversary Jeannette and I experienced a rare treat involving Cherries Jubilee from our dating days. We took an overnight anniversary trip to the Red Lion Inn in Sacramento, California and ate at the hotel restaurant. After dinner we ordered Cherries Jubilee to celebrate old times. We experienced a similar ceremony of "Burning of the Cherries" at our table by the waiter as we had at Cyrano de Bergerac's so many years before. The dessert was excellent--too excellent! I had tasted this special concoction before! It had a hint of orange zest which the waiter had mixed in the sauce. This flavor was too unique! I had only tasted it in the Cherries Jubilee from Cyrano de Bergerac's in St. Louis.

I asked our waiter to summon the dessert master. When he returned to our table I told him the dessert was excellent, but it tasted like the Cherries Jubilee we had eaten years before in St. Louis and asked him, "By any chance did you ever work at Cyrano de Bergerac's?" He responded, "Yes, I worked there while I was a student at Concordia College. Why do you ask?" I replied, "Because of the orange zest in the sauce. I've never tasted Cherries Jubilee with that flavor anywhere except here and in St. Louis." He and I were both surprised that our paths had crossed in this unique way. I gave him an extra special tip that night for the memory his dessert evoked.

St. Louis was a wonderful place to grow up in and experience on dates. It's been enjoyable reminiscing about good times, Jeannette. Thanks for walking down memory lane with me!