My Brush With Fame

By Lois O. Bruce

In the late 1930s and early '40s, Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy were very famous singing stars who appeared in many musicals on the silver screen. *Maytime* was my favorite. I saw it as often as I could collect enough glass medicine bottles to sell to the local doctor for 2 cents each to raise the dime it took to get into the theater.

My mother and I were living back in western Nebraska at the time, and I was in junior high school. Later, we moved to California, and I went to high school in San Jose.

During my senior year, I took journalism classes and became one of the main reporters on the high school newspaper. It was a fairly professional paper, thanks to our teacher, who was a former reporter herself.

One spring morning, Miss Ogier called me out of my English class to report to the journalism office. She had a pass for me to leave campus and go downtown to the hotel where Jeanette MacDonald was staying; she was in town to entertain servicemen at the local Army base. She was giving an interview to the San Jose daily newspaper reporters, and she wanted to include a reporter from the high school newspaper as well. I was to be that reporter!

I have no idea how I made it to the hotel, but eventually I found myself in the elevator with several adult reporters who were also going up to Miss MacDonald's suite. She met us at the door, looking just like she had in *Maytime,* and she led us to chairs in the living room. While the other reporters asked questions and chatted with her, I sat there like an absolute lump, completely speechless, too awed to even take notes.

After 20 minutes or so, the rest of the group got up to leave. I did, too, clutching a blank notebook in my hand. As I reached the door, Miss MacDonald laid her hand on my arm.

"Won't you stay a few more minutes?" she asked. "I'd like to hear about your school and its music program." And of course, during the course of our chat, she saw to it that I had enough notes to write a story. I floated back to school on the same cloud that had earlier borne me to the hotel!

Miss Ogier gave me until the next day to write the article; as soon as I returned, she could see that I was not coherent enough to *talk* about my experience, let alone write anything that would make sense.

It took me hours of writing and rewriting to turn out a story that I felt I could submit, but it earned me a byline on the front page. And if I had had any notion of strutting around campus like a big shot, I had only to remember how ordinary Miss MacDonald had been with us—and she really *was* a big shot!

In the Good Old Days, common courtesy applied to everyone, even movie stars. Wouldn't it be pleasant if we could say the same for today? ❖

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