

The Night of the Ice-Blue Gown

By Betty F., Atascadero, California

IN 1947, I went to my high school prom in Manhattan, New York wearing an ice-blue gown. A long, full skirt, formed by layer upon layer of floating tulle, was swooped up in back with a bustle held by two large American Beauty pink roses.

I had designed and sewn the dress as my senior project, choosing not to put in sleeves. Much to my father's distress, it was also strapless.

There was no way that this American beauty was going to leave the house in such a scandalous manner, he said.

Enter my entrepreneur aunt to the rescue. Aunt Rose lived on the floor below us and was sharing in the evening's excitement.

She also saw my father's anxiety at the sight of my gown. Taking two pieces of leftover tulle, she fashioned sleeves, tacking them on, front and back, so only the most discerning eye could see that they could be removed at a moment's notice.

Aunt Rose and I knew that my father did not have a discerning eye.

My parents had friends whose son took me to the prom. Joe was recently discharged from the Navy and active duty in the Pacific. Since he was the son of a family in my parents' circle, a decent fellow, and I didn't have a boyfriend, anyway, it turned out to be a wonderful choice.

The doorbell rang that night and there stood Joe, white rose corsage in hand. His parents stood beaming behind him.

Like a prize heifer, I was being looked over. Joe and I left in a

taxicab with both sets of parents waving.

In 1947, Times Square was a magical place, especially at night. In January of that year, and on a cold winter's evening, the Pennsylvania Hotel was beautifully lit.

Jimmy Dorsey's band was featured. In all my adolescent dreams, never had I conceived of the thrill of a renowned entertainer picking me out of the crowd.

The moment was to be an indelible memory for the rest of my life. I had leaned against the stage while the band took a break and Mr. Dorsey came toward me.

Squatting to reach my level, he smiled and quietly asked where I had gotten the "pretty blue gown."

Then, in the early morning hours, the air crisp with cold and under a clear sky, with our heels flying together and holding hands with two other couples, we ran laughing along the Great White Way, under the Broadway lights.

I've often thought about that shy Navy boy, lucky enough to have returned from World War II—a gentle soul who had left other gentle, young souls on the battlefield.

Much later that evening, he spoke to me of it, giving me an insight to a world I could not fathom.

He had stepped all over my white dancing shoes and didn't kiss me goodnight. Instead, we shook hands, and that was all right.

We went our separate ways, but in my heart, the sweetness of that night has always remained.