

The following excerpt is found on pages 13-16 from the life history of Winfred C. Black

I met Merle in August 1945 at McClasky General Hospital in Temple, Texas. I had just come from overseas from the South Pacific. I was happy that day to be closer to home, about 400 miles from home. I was assigned to a ward and got settled in with some friends that were on the same train. I was thrilled to be home again and I was enjoying walking and meeting people.

Then I saw this little 118 pound red head walk out of the ward with papers in her hand for someone. I found out she was one of the ward clerks. It was hard for me to keep my eyes off her for the next week. I was bashful, I guess. I didn't meet girls too well. I finally asked her to get me a pass so I could go to Waco to meet another girl I had met at a USO dance. She wasn't supposed to give me her address, but she did after I pressured her a little. These girls were a lot of nice girls who came and danced with the patients at the hospital. They didn't drink or come on to the guys. Merle got me the pass and I found the girl and we went dancing in the ballroom of a nice hotel in Waco. I drank beer then. I bet she drank six 6 oz. cokes that night. We had a good time of eating and dancing. I took her home in a cab. We sat and talked for awhile and I left and never saw her again.

I lay down by the bus stop and went to sleep. A bus came by and the driver woke me up and asked, "Do you want to catch this bus?" and I said, "I sure do". I rode a bus back to Temple. Merle got me a pass to Ft. Worth the next weekend. I went to a dance that there was no drinking and everyone seemed to be having a good time. I found out it was made up of older people (50 and up) but that didn't bother me. I met a young eighteen-year-old girl. She was with her older sister. Her sister's husband had been killed in the war. He was a paratrooper so we had something in common because I was a paratrooper. We had a good time that night. They took me home with them and we ate

and drank coffee and had a good visit. I spent the night in Ft. Worth and went back to the girls' house for dinner and her dad tried to teach me how to play "forty two" but I wasn't too good at that time. I had a good time visiting with that family. They were nice to me but I never saw them again.

I came back to Temple and I would get up after breakfast had been served and a lot of times I would catch a cab and go downtown and eat. A cab was only a quarter then. Then one day me and a friend were talking and Merle came out on the ward and I told Duncan (my friend), "I think I'm going to ask that red head for a date."

Duncan said, "There is no way you will ever date her."

I told him, "I'll bet you a dollar I can."

He said, "I'll call it for that will be a cinch dollar".

"Well, here I go".

(I) walked over and had a little small talk and I asked her about going to the movies and dinner that night. She thought for a minute and said ok.

"I'll pick you up in a cab before the movie", I told her.

This turned out to be an interesting night. We went to the movies and walked to the Moss Rose Café to eat when a guy got out of a cab and started in the café. He looked at us with a strange look on his face.

I looked at Merle and said, "Did you have a date with Rankin?" He was a corporal in our ward.

She said, "Yes, I did and I stood him up for you."

Well, that made me feel super. Oh, yes, Duncan did pay me a dollar on the bet we had made.

This part of my life was pretty special so I really didn't go by the book. Merle and I went together for a few times, but nothing ever materialized at that time. She got me a three-week

furlough to go home to Oklahoma. She got me an early pass so I went to town and had a few beers before the train came. Which was another mistake in my life, but I've made a lot of them. I almost stayed too long in that joint. A cab driver I was drinking with got me by the arm and said, "Let's go or you are going to miss your train." He took me to the train and said good-bye. I tried to pay him but he said, "This one is on me." I rode the train all night to Muskogee, Oklahoma. Had to catch a bus to Ft. Smith and then changed buses to Spiro. I got off the bus and started walking home for the first time in over two years. I met my Uncle Dink coming up the road. He ran and grabbed my suitcase and carried it home for me. I was glad to be home again. There is nothing like coming home to family.

I spent three weeks at home. I bought me a '39 Ford Coupe. It looked like new...had a new motor and four new tires. I bought it for \$850. That was in 1945. I paid more for it than it cost now.... only cost \$702 now. After three weeks I had my order to report to San Antonio. My Uncle Dink wanted to go with me. We two took off for San Antonio. Dink was a mechanic, so he could get a job anywhere. We came by and visited Merle that night. Really Merle was engaged to marry a First Sergeant that was overseas, so I couldn't get too interested in her, only I knew I liked her. I spent three weeks in San Antonio before I got my discharge. The war was over by then. I got my discharge on my twenty-third birthday. Me and Dink got in that little car that evening and headed for Oklahoma. I got to Austin...I went to JC Penney's and bought me a tweed suit, an overcoat, and new shoes and socks.

I told the clerk, "I'll take two new shirts".

He said, "We don't have any shirts."

I said, "Well I don't need the suit, overcoat, shoes and hat."

He said, "Wait a minute, let me look in the basement. I may find something."

He came back with two new shirts. Well, I changed clothes right there and came to Temple and knocked on Merle's door. She came to the door and didn't hardly know me. We spent the night in Temple and took off for home the next day. I'm not really following the memory book on these writings.

I went to California in November 1945. Me and a friend James Steelman. We worked in the oil field for awhile, but jobs were hard to come by after the war was over. It was Christmas and I got a letter from Merle and a picture. I really thought she would have been married by now. She had written a letter to my mom and got my address in California. She and Marion (her friend) had parted ways and she was coming back into my life and I was glad. I wrote to her and after a couple of months I returned to Oklahoma.

Dink and I went to Texas for a few days to visit Merle. Dink went along to keep my company and he liked to drive. That is when I asked Merle to marry me and she said, "Yes". We were both happy and excited about getting married. She came home with us and spent a couple of weeks getting acquainted with our family. We had a good time those two weeks. She returned home on a bus and came back in two weeks on a bus. She got her wedding dress and her clothes. We were going to get married on the 4th of July, which was my cousin's birthday. He is the one who got killed in Luzon Philippine Islands. I didn't know it but there was a thirty-day waiting period in Arkansas. So we got married on July 5th. We were married at my cousin, Dora Sampson's, house in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. Her brother-in-law married us. We were the first couple he had ever married. We are going on our 52nd year. Kress Sampson would be proud of us. There were only eight people at our wedding, but it was beautiful. Kress's wife played the piano and we had an altar. I remember I was scared to death. I made a statement that has

held true. (I said, "I'll never do that again", and Merle said, "I hope not".) We spent our first two weeks in my grandmother's house. She went to her son's house in Conway, Arkansas. So we could have her house. We were thankful for those two weeks. We never had a honeymoon, and none of our pictures turned out we had taken. So, we never had a wedding picture.