

Twenty-first Birthday

By Kay Mauser

Twenty-first birthdays are an important event. You are of legal drinking age and in 1950 it meant you could VOTE.

My husband asked where I would like to go to celebrate this date. I am sure he was unprepared for my choice. Celebration's usually meant a nice dinner followed by a play or a concert. I said, "I want to go to the ROXIE'S."

While I was in high school I had worked at Woolworth's five-and-dime store. The ladies were shocked when one of the employees gave her notice to leave, and when asked where she would go to work she told them "she was going to dance at the Roxie's." I knew the Roxie was an old theater downtown and was very popular in its day. But why did it shock the ladies at Woolworth's?

My sister-in-law and her husband were as curious as I and asked to accompany us. The day we went the marquee said there was to be a beauty contest. WOW!

There were not many people in the theater when we first arrived. This gave us plenty of time to inspect the premises. The theater must have been a very fashionable place to go at one time. The seats were old but not torn or dirty. Slowly stragglers came in and sat down. They were mostly male.

The program consisted of a few poorly acted skits, with a lot of suggestive material. There were a few, very few, reactions from the audience.

Half-way through, the master of ceremonies announced a brief intermission, which would be followed by the beauty contest.

The lights came on and ushers went up and down the aisles trying to sell boxes of candy. "Good candy and a surprise in every box. Only two bits." This to me was funnier than the skits that had been performed.

At last the lights were dimmed and beauty contest began. I don't know what I had expected. Maybe girls coming out one at a time and doing a dance and removing pieces of clothing. NOT SO. One at a time a woman walked across the stage STARK NAKED!!! Nothing on! Naked! They entered one side of the stage and exited the other.

After four or five women crossed the stage my brother-in-law whispered to Bill, "It's the same girl." And you know, he was right!

After a while the announcer called a girl's name. She came on the stage. He put a crown on her head. It was over.

We walked out. Fresh air was a welcome relief from the confines of the theater. I don't know to this day how I felt about the adventure into forbidden territory. Maybe cheated.