

The Colonel's Girl

By Faye Ruehling



It was the spring of 1958 and I was 16, privileged to attend St. Vincent's Academy, a Catholic girls' high school in Savannah. I wasn't particularly part of the "in" crowd, but tried out for and was chosen as a cheerleader for our affiliate Catholic boys' high school, Benedictine. A junior at Benedictine asked me to go to his school's graduation with him. Benedictine was a military school, and the graduation ceremony was also the occasion to award medals to undergraduates. I knew that this particular boy was going to receive several medals that night. He was not only an athlete, playing on the varsity basketball and golf teams; he was the smartest in his class. Of course I would be his date!

We continued to "go together" through the summer before our senior year and though I was having fun, there weren't any particular sparks flying in our relationship. However, when he asked if we could "go steady," I said yes. I was thinking ahead – after all, one of the biggest events of the senior year was the commissioning ceremony and dance at the military school. Since my "steady" was top banana in the aca-

demical department, he was a shoo-in for being appointed colonel, the commanding officer. I wanted to be on his arm when he led the grand march around the ballroom (the school's gym in disguise). I wanted to be "The Colonel's Girl."

I was in heaven and thought I was beautiful the night of that dance. Dressed in a homemade white evening gown with layers and layers of ruffles, poufed out over a hoop skirt, I had arrived. I was not only part of the "in" crowd, I was one of the beautiful people.

What an exciting time I had as The Colonel's Girl. There were certainly more beautiful girls on the arms of lesser officers, but that didn't seem to matter. There were so many occasions when I was proud to be his date. There was the ROTC dress review parade for

all the units in the city and there I sat on the reviewing stand with my summer dress and white hat as his sponsor. There was the St. Patrick's parade when I waved from the sidelines as he led his school in all their finery. There were all the days I was allowed to use the family car so that I could go watch him at drill practice.

Finally, there was the graduation ceremony of his senior year when he was the valedictorian. As I watched from the audience with his parents, I had to admit that during that year, a gradual change had occurred in our relationship. I was not only proud to be with him, I was in love with him. It no longer mattered to me what positions he held – I had fallen in love with the young man behind all the medals and the glory.

The years have flown by since then – 47 to be exact. We were married in a church ceremony, one where I wore another white dress that made me feel beautiful again. Only this time, I was honored to be on the arm of my beloved, the best looking man I'd ever seen in a tuxedo.