

MYRTLE REBECCA DOUGLAS

An Appreciation

-- 520 07 0328

I REMEMBER MOROJO

By

Forrest J Ackerman

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M O R O J O



SANTA BARBARA, CALIF., APRIL, 1940

(Courtesy T. Bruce Yerke)

MYRTLE REBECCA DOUGLAS

An Appreciation

Myrtle R Douglas was born June 20, 1904, in Phoenix, Arizona. She died in the early morning of November 30, 1964, in Patton, San Bernardino County, California. During the intervening years she brought the pleasure of her company and the inspiration of her life to many people, myself included.

I first knew of Myrtle when I received my first fan mag, the second copy of the old Imagination.

Through those first couple of years she was a rather shadowy image to me.

An airmail postcard from Acker and in New York to my Laranie address to the effect that they're coming back from the convention by train, and for me to try to meet them at the station. This came during my summer vacation. Later letter from Acker and -- they'd gotten off the train, even asked a likely-looking stranger if he were me. The snapshot he enclosed was the first time I unwrapped Miss Douglas with a physical being.

Met Myrtle in Chicago in 1940, Labor Day weekend.

There were so many people met for the first time -- Schroyer, Pogo, Acker and, Rocklynne, Millard --

that all that remains is the dove-soft memory of a gentle voice, a lightly-dimpled smile, a graciousness...

Later came the third week of December, 1941, and an emotional upheaval. I went to Los Angeles to try to resolve the mess I'd made of my beginnings.

Myrtle was most kind.

I saw 235½ North New Hampshire and the Ackerman garage. Forrie and Myrtle took me to a movie premiere and we had supper at what I've later determined was the Thrifty at Hollywood and Western.

Myrtle had me read aloud some letter she had received written in Esperanto, and congratulated me on my pronunciation. A pleasant time with a nice pair.

It was in December of 1944 that I had had it up to the eyeballs, with cold weather and hard-starting cars and the small-town life. I quit my job, and drove non-stop to California. No one was home at 628 or 637½ South Bixel; but Myrtle answered the door at 643. She told me there was a party at Burbees', and was willing to come along. It was a pleasant evening, and she was nice.

Thus began an acquaintanceship that grew to a warm feeling

on my part. She gave me lessons in Esperanto; lent

me her set of home-made flash cards for language study; and for a while attended a weekly beginning language course with me.

Her background developed through conversation, and with it increasing admiration. Myrtle Rebecca

Douglas Smith Gray Nolan, I salute you for your
courage and your indomitable spirit!

((omit three paragraphs))

Myrtle was living with her cousin Marcia Davenport
(a patent attorney, not the writer) and Marcia's aunt
in a rent-controlled apartment when I arrived in
1944. It was the most northerly of four adjoining
units on Bixel Street, between Wilshire Boulevard and
the first alley north. The site is now an office
building. When I first called on her at home her
small room was in front, street-side, with a piano,
a double-bed, and one wall lined with magazines on
loan from Ackerman.

I played that piano rather often.

I came on the scene shortly after she and Ackerman
had broken up. Some stupid thing about her not
giving up cigarettes when he asked her to. So I
took her out to dinner a few times. Our first dinner
date stands out strong in memory -- what is now the
Ginza in Little Tokio. A piano player, Fletcher
Smith, was working with Coleman Hawkins, and the
floor show included a one-legged dancer, Peg-Leg
Bates. We walked home from 1st and Los Angeles
Streets. That night the first A-bomb was exploded
making green glass out of the sands around
Alamogordo...

A little later my kid sister came down to play a gig in Ventura. Another pleasant memory is another date with Myrtle: picking her up, a pre-Freeway drive to Ventura, listening until curfew and sitting in once (oh, they loved me in St. Joe) and the moonlit oceanside homeward drive. Stopping for a few minutes to listen to the breakers. It would be about 5:30 AM when I dropped her at her home, and went to the nearby clubroom for a nap.

The housing shortage continued acute through 1945 and 1946. Her cousin Marcia bought a house and an adjoining four-unit apartment at 42nd Street and Raymond Avenue, leaving Myrtle alone in the apartment with the lease. This was a short-lived affair.

Myrtle invited the slum shack group from Battle Creek to be her house guests. Talk about the camel that shoved his nose into the tent!

This lovely person ended up on a cot in the washroom at the rear of the flat, while all desirable rooms were taken over by her house guests.

The camel eventually occupied the whole tent (so sorry, this my garden now) and Myrtle ended up sleeping on the front porch of Marcia's place. The magazine ~~wa~~ at 643 went back to its owner Ackerman. The piano, a heavily-built former player piano, ended up in storage with my kid sister for several years. I am happy that she heard good music from it more than once.

Myrtle called on Mr. and Mrs. Perdue about a year after their marriage. She brought a wedding present, a set of butcher knives, and we enjoyed her visit. The Perdues likewise called on Myrtle once at Marcia's, shortly after Marcia married Buck. It was another pleasant evening, including among other things learning that Myrtle sometimes dreamt in color...

Myrtle's last marriage, to John Nolan, is --- strike that.

Mr. and Mrs. John Nolan called on Mr. and Mrs. Perdue at the Baxter address at least once. It was, as they say, a good dig. Her last years could have been happy, because John and she shared a love for the outdoors and a love for the nudist movement; but I greatly fear that John Nolan was a character entirely too demanding upon that self-sacrificing Myrtle. They lived on the high desert area of Southern California; water had to be trucked in; and I don't believe he ever carried his full share of the marriage mutual load.

I last saw the living Myrtle in October of 1964, when a small group made up of her cousin Pogo, Edward Dale Hart, Pogo's daughter Nancy and Pogo's next-door neighbor Marian, and Mr. 0328 drove out to Patton State Hospital.

House rules at Patton limit visitors to one at a time. We found that her brother from Arizona had also visited on that date, and she was fatigued; so while Marion entertained her small daughter, Pogo, Hart, and 520 went to the visitor's waiting room. While Pogo was seeing Myrtle I told Hart that our main concern is for Myrtle's survival and letting her know that others care; and suggested a sixty-second maximum for our stay. He acceded.

Damn, Meyer, I am glad that none of you saw Myrtle. She weighed about 65 pounds -- up fifteen from when she was admitted -- and she was exhausted. We chatted, I kissed her on the forehead, and pulled Hart away.

It is my habit to throw a little party on the fifth Sunday of every month that has five Sundays. I did so again November 29th. It did not break up until after midnight. Strange indeed were the fallings-out of that evening. . . It was the morning of November 30th that it happened.

I do believe that Myrtle looked at the long way up; that she realized that recovery would but lead to another operation; that she said the hell with it and turned up her toes.

Funeral services were held in 29 Palms on December 4th. I notified all interested parties that I could think of. My telephone bill, which with itemized

billing includes the number called, the date and time, would make an interesting Exhibit A to this appreciation.

Perhaps thirty people attended the funeral. You would recognize the names of Hart, Pogo, and 0328. You might also remember Vodoso and John Nolan. Some of you would remember Marcia, now yecept gesinjoroj Buck Miller.

Funeral services were read by the minister of a self-realization type congregation to which John Nolan belonged and whose services she sometimes attended. The minister spoke of her extreme devotion to others and her self-sacrificing nature...

It would appear that the cemetery serves both 29 Palms and the nearby community of Morongo Valley.

The drive to the cemetery was long and slow.

Things are confused about such things as cause of death, disposition of the body, etc. I figure that if anybody wanted me to know they'd have told me.

I have a strong impression that Myrtle, serving her fellow-man to the last, left her body to cancer research. Why, then were we permitted to view the body at the mortuary?

Did the cancer research foundation, to which she willed her body, permit us to go through the funeral rites, and pick up the body later? (We did not

stay for the lowering of the casket).

Myrtle had a hysterectomy about 1946. Didn't this excise any carcinoma then present?

I shall always cherish my memory of Myrtle. She was a good woman. If there were fault (if this can be called fault) it was in over-believing in the innate goodness of man. Myrtle, dear, wherever you are, the world is still full of bastards...and men will continue to lie to women, and women will continue to believe those lies; What is your real feeling about Dr. Strangelove, and why is 900% overkill better than 200% overkill?

The world is richer for having had Myrtle pass through it. Can any of you bastards (including myself) make the same claim?

I miss you.

-- 520 07 0328

M O R O J O A N D F O J A K



New York City, July, 1939

I REMEMBER MOROJO

By

Forrest J Ackerman

What no one else may bring out, what possibly no one else ever knew or may remember, is why a woman whose name was Myrtle R. Douglas should be known as Morojo (pronounced mo-ro'yo). It is known that she was an Esperantist; her son, fan Virgil Douglas Smith, was nicknamed Vodoso; her cousin Patti Gray is still referred to as Fogo; T. Bruce Yerke was sometimes called Tobojo; her fan friend Arthur Louis Joquel was Alojo; and so it went in those early Esperanto-oriented days around LA Fandom.

Why, then, was she not called Morodo?

Because she was such a super-fan of Fojak (that's me) in those days that she in effect trot of herself as a female counterpart of FJA and hence called herself the Esperanto equivalent of MRJ. As if, in English, she had called herself Emarjay.

Perhaps no one would be more surprised than Myrtle that I am contributing to a memorial about her because I had scarcely spoken to her for 20 years. I got mad at her about half my life ago (for purely personal reasons, nothing to do with fandom) and I stayed that way. The way I stayed with Laney till the time of his death. The way I expect to stay with Mel Hunter and Scott Meredith. Altho it is not impossible for me to overcome an old enmity: in times past I have had bitter feuds with Wollheim, Moskowitz & Pohl, and today we get along famously. But I doubt that time will ever come with Judith Merrill; and it did not come with Morojo.

However.

I will say this.

I remember Morojo as the greatest female fanne who ever lived. Lee Hoffman was great in her time. Trudy Henken was the queen of Weird Tales letterhacks. Trudy Kuslan was a true-blue actifanné. Eleanor Busby has been perhaps Myrtle's modern equivalent.

My god, I forgot about Bjo.

The next Perdue-produced Fan Memorial you read will be about the late FJA, sponsored by Bjo.

Alright, I leave it to posterity to decide who was the greater fanne, Bjo or Morojo.

Anyway, about Morojo. I think there never wd have been 50 issues of Imagination! (the original club organ of the Los Angeles chapter, #4, of the Science Fiction League) and the fanzine into which it later metamorphosed, Voice of the Inagi-Nation (Vom) if Morojo had not cut the majority of the stencils and cranked off more than her share of copies on the mimeo. She was a real pro in the typing, stenciling & mimeoing departments. An excellent proof-reader. And she was a staunch supporter of nonstop paragraphing & Ackermanese, god bless her--I say, fully conscious of the fact that she was an atheist, as an I.

She was a firstclass treasurer of Lassfass, and probably secretary at some time too. Heaven help me, I forget after 30 years if she was ever Director, but I wdn't be a bit surprised.

She poured a lot of time & money & energy & emotion into the LASFS. She fought the good fight in the horrid days when the club was being crucified by the Khanves (the Insurgents, the Laney gang).

She collaborated with me on some issues of a Fapazine, Novacious, and contributed to my Fantasticonglomeration (Glon). She had her own little Fapazine for awhile, Guteto (Droplet), a vehicle for propagandizing Esperanto along sci-fi fans. She was an expert Esperantist.

She had a helluva lot to do with the publication of FANCYCLOPEDIA #1.

She designed & executed my famous "futurist-costume"--and her own--worn at the First World Science-Fiction Convention, the Nycon of 1939. In 1940 at the first Ehicon she & I put on a skit based on some dialog from THINGS TO COME, and won some kind of a prize. In 1941 at the Denvention she wore a Merrittesque AKKA-mask (frog face) devised by the then young & as yet unknown master filmonster model maker & animator, Ray Harryhausen. In 1946 at the Pacificon in LA, I understand she created a sensation as A. Merritt's Snake Mother--

I did not see her in this costume, being ill in bed at the time.

She was a vociferous opponent of the Exclusion act.

She once had a controversial article published in Olon Wiggins' Science Fiction Fan called "I Favor Fan Feuds!"

Her money, as much as mine, made it possible for a youthful fan named Hollerbochen--correction: Ray Bradbury--to get to the First World Science Fiction Convention.

Something which I consider to her credit: I think she was pretty miffed with Jack Speer during the period when he was expressing himself as quite antiNegro.

She introduced the green-&-brown typewriter ribbon to fandom.

I believe Stapledon was one of her favorite authors, Ayn Rand's "Anthem" one of her favorite works.

She met Edgar Rice Burroughs & HG Wells.

I understand she was a nudist (not during the days that I knew her, but later).

It is very likely that she contributed above & beyond the call of duty to the Big Pond Fund & Fantasy Foundation.

She was very kind to the old sci-fi author Bob Olsen.

I think her special friends were Paul Freehaver, Bob Tucker, Everett Evans, "Doc" Lowndes, Art Joquel, Barbara Bovard, Walt Daugherty, Ray Bradbury, Rosco Wright, Charlie Hornig, Dale Hart--and Elmer Perdue, who phoned me & asked me if I wd care to contribute some remarks about Morajo, I really don't have a speck of time to spare away from my professional commitments but I have made this time because I wd be the last to deny that Myrtle Douglas devoted a lot of her time to me.

Faced with a deadline, I have now said all that I can think of. She was a real science fiction fanne. That is my final remark.

