

JENNIE AND BEN

By Robert L. Rhodes

This is a story that my mother, Jennie (Hughes, Rhodes) Trimby told me in a conversation I had with her several years ago, when I was collecting information for a short biography for our genealogy files.

I'm not sure of the exact time of this incident, but it had to be during the first half of the 1910 to 1920 decade. Jennie had accepted a job as housekeeper for the Shaw family. Mr. Shaw was a prominent business man in Decatur at that time, and he and Mrs. Shaw had a son Lauren and a daughter Ivra, who were at college age. While in School Ivra had contracted Tuberculosis and at the time Jennie went to work in this household, Ivra was in an advanced stage of the disease. That was the reason that they needed a housekeeper; so that the parents could spend all of their time nursing their daughter.

The Shaw's lived on the west side of Decatur where there were several large estates and the Shaw estate was one of them. So, in addition to a housekeeper, they hired a gardener to keep up the lawn and shrubbery on the estate, and Ben Trimby was hired as the gardener.

Naturally Ben and Jennie became acquainted and a courtship evolved which turned into a proposal of marriage. As the marriage date neared, Ben forged a check on Mr. Shaw's bank account, and when it was discovered he was arrested and charged with fraud. I do not have the details of how that was resolved, but my mother said that this incident ended the marriage plans.

At that time World War 1 was raging in Europe and the United States was about to get involved, so Ben joined the Decatur unit of the Illinois National guard and went with his unit to France to take part in the combat against the German's.

This was at about the time that the Shaw's decided to send their daughter, Ivra, to a TB Sanitarium in Saranac Lake, New York, and to send Jennie with her as a nurse companion. It was while Jennie was there that Willy Rhodes (who lived in Effingham IL), and Jennie began to correspond and that developed into a marriage proposal. So Jennie came home to Decatur in 1917, and she and Willy were married

The Rhodes and Hughes families had been close friends from the days when Willy and Jennie were children, so it was not surprising that they would marry. They set up housekeeping in a new house next door to Willy's parents, on Virginia Ave. in Effingham. They lived at this place while three children were born to them, and in 1923 they moved to Decatur, in Macon County, where three of Jennie's sisters lived.

In the mean time, after the War was over, Ben came home to Decatur with an honorable discharge from the Army and married a lady named Della, and I do not have her maiden name. Ben and Della set up housekeeping in Decatur, and they also raised a family

Willy and Jennie raised their family at 1718 N. Gulick Ave in Decatur, through-out the 1920 decade and into the 30's when in 1936 they moved to a rented home and later, in 1941, they bought another home at 979 W. King Street in Decatur, but by that time all of their children had married and had established households of their own.

They lived at this address all through the World War 2 years and afterwards until in 1952, Willy died of Carcinoma of the Colon at age 73. Jennie lived at the King Street address for a couple of years after Willy died, when she sold the place and moved into an apartment in a house on the north-west corner of Union and Eldorado Streets.

In the meantime, Ben and Della Trimby had raise their family to maturity and at sometime in the late 50's Della, Ben's wife had died. Sometime after Della's death, Ben found out that Jennie was widowed, so he came to her apartment to visit her. This developed into a courtship and a marriage proposal, and in 1961 they were married, and began a life together that they had hoped for some 47 or 48 years ago.

Ben and Jennie lived for a while at Ben's home place in the Boiling Springs area, but soon bought a small house on Vine Street in Decatur in the Ravina park area on the north-west side of Decatur. They lived there until 1971, when Ben died. Jennie sold the house and went to live in an apartment in a large house on West Prairie Street. Eventually she went to live in the Anna B. Millikin Home for elderly ladies. After about 10 years at the Home Jennie died at the age of 92 from Congestive Heart Disease

All of Jennie's children were Rhodes children and although we loved our father and Jennie loved Willy and they had been happy together for 34 years, we were all happy that our mother had a chance to have a happy time with Ben Trimby, who she had been engaged to as a young lady in her early twenties.