

## **“THIS IS YOUR LIFE – JEANETTE MacDONALD”**

*Written by Madeline Bayless, April, 2012. Presentation narrated by Linda Tolman, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012 at the Mac/Eddy Club event in Studio City, CA.*

Nelson had made his decision that his 1952 Concert Tour would be his last. It goes without saying that he carefully selected the songs he would sing on this, his FAREWELL TOUR, for what he wanted to be remembered as: A CONCERT RECITALIST.

But, Nelson was still haunted by the loss of the one woman who had meant everything to him. Ever since the moment he first saw her at MGM working on her film “The Merry Widow” in 1933, he was completely captivated by Jeanette MacDonald.

For him, it absolutely was, love at first sight! He soon realized that Jeanette would be the only woman he would love. When he told her that, Jeanette was never to forget those words.

On a personal note, I remember most vividly when my father began his association with Nelson. The word on the studio lot was that Nelson was “taken with Jeanette MacDonald”, but whether or not she reciprocated was unknown. This was before Nelson was even considered for “Naughty Marietta”. It seems that my father was not happy about Nelson becoming involved with Jeanette.

Dad had quickly recognized Nelson’s devotion to his musical career. He also knew from studio gossip that Jeanette was a girl who had fought her way up from the rough and tumble life of the musical comedy stage and therefore might possibly lead Nelson away from his goals.

It did not take long before his assessment of Jeanette changed as he saw she seemed very attracted to Nelson’s dedication to his successful classical music career. When he learned that Jeanette was going to go to NYC to attend Nelson’s New York debut at Town Hall on February 18th, 1934, his opinion definitely changed.

As time went by, he saw that it was Nelson who changed Jeanette’s life. She yearned to be in the classical music world and it was Nelson who opened that world to her.

Now 17 years later, sometime in 1950, Nelson had no idea what had happened to cause her abrupt departure from his life and love. All he knew was that she had abandoned him after so many years. He knew that their life was sometimes tumultuous, but the status of their love was never an issue. Her startling departure remained an unbearable sadness in his life. In fact, his life without her had turned into a rudderless shambles.

As had been his custom over the years, when they had a disagreement, almost always over a professional decision, he sometimes had to wait a day or two for her to be ready to accept his return. For him, it was a matter of his not being able to live without her love

and support and the stability she gave him. But this time it seemed as though she had closed that chapter of her life. As could be expected, he was desolate at the separation, but this time she was not there to assuage his anguish.

Now, in the fall of 1952, he made a mental decision to try, one more time, to attempt to make contact with her after her prolonged absence.

On Tuesday night, November 11th, 1952, Jeanette was scheduled to give a recital at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium. He purchased tickets for himself and Ann, because he knew he had to escort the woman from whom he could not be divorced.

To even try do otherwise would only have made for a very nasty scene as the woman to whom he was married would not allow him to attend without her. Ann had always made it a point that every time she was in public, she made certain that every one around her was aware that she was “Mrs. Nelson Eddy!” But, as long as Ann kept to the negotiated deal to protect Jeanette’s reputation, he lived up to his end of the arrangement. In doing so, he had almost forfeited his career in pursuit of protecting Jeanette. The moment he was seated in the Philharmonic auditorium, word flashed through the crowd: “NELSON EDDY IS HERE!”

There was no doubt that the information made its way backstage and one wonders what was in Jeanette’s mind when she heard those words. At the conclusion of her concert, Nelson knew he should go backstage, but having Ann in tow might have precipitated an outburst from Ann that would embarrass Jeanette and he was not going to allow that to happen.

He and Ann had been invited to the reception later that evening given in Jeanette’s honor by their good friends, Elinor and Wayne Griffin. The Griffin’s had also been across-the-street neighbors of Nelson for over five years when he lived in Hancock Park and they were very good friends. They were really like family to Nelson. Their relationship with Nelson went back years, to the evening he made his memorable concert debut in Los Angeles back on February 28th, 1933, nineteen years ago.

It was a performance the Griffin’s had never forgotten. That night Nelson substituted for the great German soprano, Lotte Lehman, who was ill. The concert was sold out so Nelson was assured of a good audience. Also, Nelson did know Lotte personally. He was happy to take on the concert date the next night after his concert in San Diego even though singing a concert without a rest day between was highly unusual. But Nelson had great physical stamina, which was a blessing.

Nelson took that Los Angeles audience by acclamation! The audience was swept off their feet by Nelson’s magnificent voice and his handsome appearance. Although he had finished his entire 1933 program, including encores, the audience demanded more. He sang all of his concert program from 1932 and encores before they would allow him to conclude his performance. His reviews the following morning were sensational! Jeanette did attend his concert and later visited him backstage.

The Griffin's remained close friends of Nelson for the rest of Nelson's life. Nelson sang many of Mrs. Griffin's songs under her composer identity of Elinor Remick Warren, Elinor's maiden name. The Griffin's were also good friends with Jeanette and she too sang Elinor's lovely songs. However, it seems likely that Nelson himself introduced Jeanette to the Griffin's.

He was "Uncle Nelson" to the Griffin's two boys. Wayne and Elinor were very trusted friends of Nelson's for over 34 years. They understood the relationship between Jeanette and Nelson and his situation with his "wife". Being neighbors, they maintained a civil relationship with Ann. If there was another woman who understood how to deal with the artistic temperament of Nelson, other than Jeanette, it was Elinor. Elinor had the same calming effect on him that Jeanette had.

When Nelson lived across the street from Elinor and Wayne, it was a relatively common occurrence for Nelson to tuck his music under his left arm and walk across the street to the Griffin's home where Elinor would play his accompaniment while he sang from the great classic baritone repertoire.

Brahms was a special favorite of Nelson's. Wayne spoke of Nelson's magnificent rendition in German of Brahms' "Vier ernst Gesanges", "Four Serious Songs". This was extremely difficult repertoire and only a serious and dedicated artist could perform this classic! The songs were based on the text from the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes, and from First Corinthians. The first three songs were from Ecclesiastes. The fourth song was from First Corinthians. It was interesting to note that these were the last songs Brahms composed before his death. Brahms, instead of using the title of either Four Biblical or Spiritual Songs, chose to call them "Four Serious Songs"!

It would seem likely that Nelson made contact with Jeanette at the reception but he would never put her in an embarrassing position. His feeling for her was always below the surface of what he displayed publicly. This is how this scenario began. He had attended her concert; may have seen her backstage; and for sure at the reception.

Unknown to Jeanette, but at the same time, Nelson was being beseeched by Ralph Edwards, a television producer of a TV program titled "This Is Your Life", to appear as a surprise guest. Jeanette was going to be the subject of a program and to have Nelson Eddy appear would ensure the success of the show! Nelson had flatly turned down the request.

Nelson was fearful that Jeanette might just treat him as though he was just some "old fan". That was a rejection he emotionally could not handle. Jeanette's favorite sister, Blossom, still loyal to Nelson, secretly believed that her sister loved the man even though she no longer even mentioned his name. Blossom had arranged to have a lunch date with Nelson a few days before Jeanette's concert. The TV program was scheduled for the day after her concert on Wednesday evening, November 12th, 1952.

At lunch, Blossom finally told Nelson what had really happened to Jeanette that fateful day at the studio. As had always been her routine, Jeanette reviewed the scenes that had been shot the previous day, called “the Dailies or Rushes”. When she saw a very handsome leading man on the screen she was pleased. But, when she saw the leading lady, she was shocked! This actress she saw on the screen was a woman who was obviously beginning to transition into middle age! Her total emotional and physical collapse at what she recognized as the end of her film career as a Movie Star was overwhelming to Jeanette! She was completely traumatized by this turn of events. She stormed back to her dressing room, gathered her belongings and left the studio without a word to anyone. When she reached home she left strict orders that under no circumstances was Nelson to be allowed on her property! When Nelson found out she had gone home he instantly went to Twin Gables but was refused entrance. He spent countless days trying to see and talk with Jeanette, but to no avail. He was devastated and even attempted suicide!

During this time of separation she seemed to have little recollection of their long history together, or perhaps found reasons to blame Nelson for what had happened. Many months later she did return to her normal state but she thought there was no way she could approach Nelson again because of the damage she had inflicted on him.

Nelson listened to Blossom as she said to him that it would look very bad for Jeanette if he did not appear on this TV program. He heard her explanation that Jeanette’s greatest fame, and his, was their magnificent films they made together. He finally conceded to make an appearance on the program. Nelson understood that the program was a secret to Jeanette and, as his friends would tell you, if you told Nelson something was a secret, he would go to his grave without revealing it, so there was nothing to worry about Nelson accidentally mentioning anything to Jeanette.

Punctual, as Nelson always was, by the time Jeanette arrived at the El Capitan where the program was to be done, the parking attendant instructed them to park her car “next to Nelson Eddy’s!” Jeanette was quick to note the instruction. She instantly questioned Blossom about it and Blossom made up some story that momentarily steered Jeanette away from the possibility of Nelson being at this show. Jeanette had no idea of what the show was about and she was only told she was to present a plaque to Ralph Edwards for his charitable work. Her Public Relations Representative, Helen Ferguson, had negotiated the arrangement for Jeanette to appear on this TV program.

Once the program began, Jeanette went along with its premise of it being about her life. Most of the guests, other than her sisters, were nondescript at best. Jeanette, sitting beside Gene, seemed interested in what was going on, but Gene appeared a bit “bored”. Only when Edwards talked about her films with Nelson Eddy did she appear a little nervous and disturbed.

One of the guests was the minister who presided at the MGM staged wedding of Jeanette and Gene back in June of 1937. It was far from being a happy memory for Jeanette!

However, it served its purpose of satisfying the demand of Mayer that Jeanette marry, but just not to Nelson, and if she did, her contract would be secure.

It was appropriate that Jeanette's two sisters both then appeared as guests on the program. Both Blossom and Elsie spoke of their younger sister's early career which was amusing.

Nelson had been ordered by Louis B. Mayer to sing two songs at Jeanette's wedding service. With Nelson's voice shaking with emotion, his first song was the beautiful "I Love You Truly", which he sang from his heart. A little later he sang his extremely edited version of "O Perfect Love" which was Jeanette's selection. Jeanette had confided in Blossom that she did not know how she managed to walk down that aisle with Nelson's voice ringing in her ears and she admitted that it felt like she was doing a scene for a film.

After the two sisters had finished with their part in the program, a voice was suddenly heard singing the last verse from the second song Nelson had sung at her wedding, "O Perfect Love".

At the sound of Nelson's voice, Jeanette was instantly brought to tears even though he had yet to appear in person! When Nelson emerged from behind the curtain he instantly grasped her right hand as he continued to sing. Gene provided her with a handkerchief to blot her tears with her left hand.

When we view the TV program, Nelson is holding his own music of this song in his hand as he sings. He probably had not looked at this sheet music since the wedding and needed it in case he had forgotten a bit of the lyric. But when he concludes the song and Jeanette rises to embrace him, the music has disappeared!

Nelson may have dropped the music or it could have been that while the camera was focused on Nelson as he finished the song, there was a break in the filming to allow Jeanette a moment to emotionally try to recover and for Nelson to set aside his music.

As Jeanette listened to Nelson as he completed the song she then stood up and immediately embraced Nelson! Nelson, thrilled at her reception, returned her enthusiastic and warm embrace! Nelson was always aware of what he had been taught by their beloved director, Woody Van Dyke, so as not to block Jeanette from the camera. Nelson, beaming at her, instinctively held her with his left hand spread high on her back, his right arm and hand around her waist, as he had done for so many years. When Jeanette responded to his song with her energetic hug and with a wonderful and joyous smile on her face, Nelson was overjoyed!

Many years later, when his music for this song was located, Nelson had printed at the bottom of his music in capital letters, the words "WONDERFUL MOMENTS!" Without doubt, he wrote that notation after he had experienced the joy of uniting with Jeanette on

the “This Is Your Life” TV Program! What had been at the wedding, a terrible moment for him, was now “WONDERFUL MOMENTS”.

The look on each of their faces was an immediate indication to all who saw their response was that these two people meant something to each other. As years went by, Ralph Edwards always said that this specific program was the most popular one he had ever produced, and the one people always requested to see again.

Nelson, beaming at Jeanette, continued to grasp her hand, sometimes with both of his hands, as he always used to do. The intensity of her warm embrace had encouraged Nelson and grasping her hands in his was Nelson’s way of communicating his love for her. He kissed her hand, but never turned loose of her hand until he was forced to in order to align himself with the group for the end of the show. It was noted in one tape of this TV program that when they did line up for the group shot, that Nelson slipped his arm around Blossom perhaps to let her know he was a very happy man at Jeanette’s reception and he owed that to Blossom!

But the story did not end there.

The evening included a dinner at a popular Swedish restaurant, “Bit of Sweden”, on the Sunset Strip. As the dinner ended, the events that followed, when viewed in retrospect, had to have been orchestrated by Nelson and Blossom.

They had agreed that if Jeanette did greet him with “enthusiasm”, as she did, Blossom was to be prepared to be UNAVAILABLE to drive Jeanette home as had been previously arranged.

But, if Jeanette had not been enthusiastic at seeing Nelson, Blossom would take her home and Nelson would give up any idea of ever meeting again with Jeanette.

But, as Isabel loved to say in her Victorian manner, “The hand of fate would determine the outcome and perhaps it was their destiny to be together!”

However, Nelson was also prepared! He had sent Ann home in a cab.

As he walked back toward Blossom and Jeanette, Blossom asked Nelson if he could take Jeanette home because she had promised some fan to speak with him. Nelson immediately responded happily to Blossom’s request for him to drive Jeanette to Twin Gables! Both Blossom and Nelson were playing out what had been previously arranged! Nelson was desperate to talk to Jeanette and now he would get his opportunity. Meanwhile, Gene had long since disappeared to pursue his own activities.

Nelson assisted Jeanette into his automobile and as they approached the driveway out to Sunset Boulevard, one wonders what was going through Jeanette’s mind? Her heart must have been pounding at suddenly finding herself sitting beside this man she loved after the

many months of separation. She expected him to turn left, west, as it was only a short drive to the turnoff to Twin Gables. But Nelson had other plans!

He turned right, east, and went back into Hollywood. He turned left on Highland Avenue to Barham Boulevard where he turned off and made the turn onto Mulholland Drive! In the thirties, forties, and fifties it was known as “Lover’s Lane”.

Jeanette instantly knew he was taking her on their old familiar “long way home”. Nelson knew every turnout where they used to park and he found the one he wanted. At this juncture, they began their conversation and as always, he took the initiative and told her about the mess he had made of his life without her. No doubt she was shocked but she also sensed that he was reaching out to her. She was going to be very careful that she did not make another mistake. He needed her consolation and she gave it to him, but cautiously. As they continued their drive along Mulholland, he probably took either Beverly Glen Blvd. or Benedict Canyon Road back to Sunset Blvd. and then to Twin Gables. As he said goodnight to her at her door, they mutually agreed they could still be “friends”.

Nelson had been very badly hurt, almost destroyed, by his experience with losing Jeanette. He was going to be very careful about rekindling anything too quickly. Isabel, however, was delighted. She and Jeanette had kept up some contact during this separation but Isabel knew she could not do anything about Nelson’s private life. But now that the ice had been broken, she set up a dinner and invited Jeanette as the one guest but did not tell Nelson who the guest was going to be. He just thought it was some friend of his Mother’s.

Nelson was in the living room trying out some songs when Jeanette arrived. To say he was surprised is putting it mildly but over dinner he relaxed and was actually upset to learn Jeanette had driven to Isabel’s by herself! When it was time for her to go home, Nelson insisted Isabel ride with Jeanette and he would follow them to make sure Jeanette got home safely! The majority of their friends would confirm that Jeanette was not a good driver, especially at night! Then he brought his Mother back home. It seemed as though Nelson was quick to return to his role of “Jenny’s protector”. A role he had played for so many years!

Their reconciliation process began slowly partly because Jeanette had to finish with her concert tour although she was home during the Christmas and New Year holidays. Her final concert appears to have been in January of 1953. Nelson had ended his Farewell Concert tour in 1952. From what we have discovered she only made a very few solo appearances in 1953 but there was no indication that she ever toured again. It was then that they could really begin to restore their relationship.

When she was home, Nelson was eager to pursue the woman he loved. He began by asking her out for dinner at restaurants they both liked. That also included a nice car ride before he took her home.

They often took in a movie at the Village or Bruin theatres in Westwood. He would get her seated and then he would quickly go to the concession stand to purchase a “Snickers” candy bar for each of them. That candy was a special favorite of both of them.

He would often bring records over to Twin Gables and they would spend the evening listening to music and Jeanette would serve coffee and dessert.

When they did not want to go to a restaurant, Jeanette would either have her cook prepare a meal or sometimes she would cook. Now and then Nelson would pitch in and they cooked for themselves.

Thursday evenings Nelson usually had dinner with Isabel at her home, but now Jenny was with him.

If there was a concert at the Hollywood Bowl, or other venues, they would attend. Of course he had a box at the Bowl for many years so whenever there was to be an interesting program, they could always attend the performance.

Sometimes Nelson would stop in Santa Monica and pick up food from what had been their favorite Chinese restaurant and the Chinese lady who was the owner, was proud of their patronage. It was food they had always enjoyed, and he took it to Jeanette’s for their dinner if she did not feel up to driving to Santa Monica.

Soon Nelson invited Jeanette to take walks with him as they had done for years. He was aware that the walks could not be too demanding for Jeanette so he kept them easy for her. She knew he loved to walk and she always enjoyed it too. In the daytime they would walk around the Bel Air area. Then he began taking her on short rides in the evening to Beverly Hills or Westwood for their walks. Jeanette had always loved to “window shop” since the very early days of their relationship and she still enjoyed doing it.

If she was attracted to something, Nelson made note of it and returned to purchase it for her, just as he used to do.

As their intimate good friends were made aware of their blossoming reconciliation, they were invited to small parties and enjoyed the camaraderie of their small group of dear friends who were aware of their situation.

Jeanette began to have small parties also and kept them small because she knew Nelson preferred them that way. Nelson automatically assumed the role of male host of the parties as he used to do. Nelson was always the last to leave if he had to. It did not take long before they became intimate again and then he was more likely to remain with her.

They soon returned to their old habit of dancing a last dance together after the last guest had left. Nelson had not forgotten how much Jeanette enjoyed dancing with him and him with her!



In the beginning of their reconciliation they quickly began singing together again. Solos or duets allowed them to express the joy of singing as well as their feelings for each other. Sometimes Jeanette played the piano, other times Nelson took over. If the music required transposing for the right key, Nelson had Jeanette do it because she was better at transposing than he was. At least that was what he had said for years.

One of their most favorite past times they had always enjoyed was to take car trips together. This began when they were making their first film in 1934. One evening Nelson had phoned her on her private line. Jeanette answered. Nelson asked if she would like to go for a little ride. Jeanette made it clear that she had to be home by 9:30 or 10:00 at the very latest as this was a work night. He promised. What she did not tell him was that she was already in bed! She knew that if she told him that, he would back off, and insist that he would call another time. Miss Jeanette was not about to pass up this opportunity to have a little private time with this handsome and exciting young baritone! When she hung up she scrambled to get dressed and barely finished just as his car came up the driveway!

It went from there into something they regularly did. The privacy and therefore safety of the car allowed them to talk on a personal level and permitted them to express their feelings for each other that was not possible at the studio. At the studio it was just mostly work, work, work, except when they had lunch and afternoon tea together!

There were often times when the ride itself made Jeanette drowsy and sometimes it put her to sleep. She felt safe and secure with Nelson, her head on his broad shoulder and covered with a lap robe that Nelson kept in his car to keep her warm. In the beginning, if Nelson got her home before ten, he would not wake her up until the stroke of ten! To wait a minute longer he knew her mother would be at the front door, waiting for her daughter! Anna MacDonald was not keen on her "Movie Star" daughter being interested in this "mere singer", as Anna derogatorily referred to him. Nelson did not meet Anna's standard as a suitable prospect for Jeanette but apparently her daughter thought otherwise.

Anna was also unaware of how financially well off Nelson really was. He not only had a substantial income from his highly profitable concert career, but from his radio and film contracts as well, and would soon have another income source from his recordings. He far out earned Jeanette and always did even though in the beginning she made more money from MGM than he did but he soon caught up with her when his contract was renewed after the release of "Naughty Marietta". He had already achieved "Millionaire" status and for a young man of his age and in the midst of the Great Depression, that was phenomenal!

We do know that he was very generous in spending his money on beautiful pieces of jewelry for her! It included the famous emerald engagement ring he gave her a month before they left for Lake Tahoe to make "Rose Marie". Christmas of 1935 she received the magnificent combination necklace/ brooch with the 360 diamonds which she wore for

the rest of her life. There was nothing too good for his “Baby”, which was Nelson’s private name for Jeanette.

In casual situations he usually called her “Jenny” or “Jen”. It was while they were making “Marietta” when one day, after lunch in her dressing room, she confronted Nelson about his addressing her as either “Miss MacDonald” or “Dear”. She said they had become good friends, and her friends called her “Jam”. He then explained to her that he already had his name for her but was not sure if it was alright with her. She asked for the name he had selected. He told her that from the time when he first met her, he had sensed that he was going to be responsible for her, and therefore he had privately called her “Baby”. She indicated that his name was very acceptable but only in private! In casual settings he called her “Jenny” or just “Jen”. But Anna still disapproved of him until shortly before her death when she finally conceded that he was a good man.

After a bit of a rocky start at the studio, things had settled down and Jeanette found herself actually enjoying going to work with her new Co-star, Nels, and Director, Woody. Soon Nelson was picking her up in the morning, and when possible, taking her home when they finished work, unless he had radio rehearsals.

As their relationship deepened, Jeanette often spent weekends at Nelson’s home with his Mother playing the role of chaperone. It was then that he learned that Jeanette had been “afraid of the dark” since childhood. Jeanette slept in Isabel’s room which had Twin Beds and Nelson immediately purchased a lovely “Night Light” that Isabel left on during the night so Jeanette could sleep.

It was this closeness she had with Isabel where she learned much about what made Nelson the man she loved, his strengths and his weaknesses, from the woman who had raised him. At some point Jenny admitted to Isabel that she never had a problem with being “afraid of the dark” when she slept with Nelson! With him she always felt protected, secure and contented. Even when Nelson was away as on tour, Isabel would encourage her to stay overnight with her because she knew Jenny always had a good night’s rest when she slept in Nelson’s bed. Another reason she encouraged Jenny to stay was that Nelson disapproved of Jenny driving at night!

Sometime either in late 1935 or early 1936, Nelson had acquired a lease on a property that over time he converted into a very lovely hideaway home for the two of them. Over time he invested a considerable sum of money to remodel the structure to satisfy their needs. Suffice to say Jenny wanted to contribute financially to this project but Victorian Nelson refused to accept any assistance because he felt the Man was responsible for providing a home for the girl who was, at that time, the girl he was going to marry! Later she was his “true wife!”. But that is a story unto itself.

Mostly Nels and Jenny lived at “Mists” by themselves. The household chores were divided. Nelson took care of the exterior but did cook and did do the dishes. Jeanette was responsible for the interior decorating and that included being the bed maker and duster and learned to be a respectable cook. In fact Jenny found she really enjoyed domesticity.

The Twin Beds story became fodder for Nelson's fans but they did not understand that it was Isabel who had the Twin beds in her home because she had close friends whom she would invite for a visit. Those friends were thrilled to accept her invitation and they enjoyed being able to be together in Isabel's room and chat in her room at night. When Jenny slept with Isabel, Nelson always had a firm hand with Jenny and would let both of "his girls" know that he did not want to hear any chatter or giggling after ten pm because Jenny needed her rest. We can guess that they just were careful to whisper after the witching hour of ten! Nelson later moved that bedroom set to "Mists" where it was used primarily for guests. Nelson himself had a very low opinion of Twin Beds!

Over their years together, and out of the public's eye, they traveled by car extensively all over California from border to border and beyond. That included many visits to their favorite destinations. They often made many trips to visit Lake Tahoe. It was there in 1935 that their love affair really began and on October 20th, 1943, it was where they had recited their wedding vows to each other. For them, it remained "a special place" all of their lives.

They also made periodic visits to the historic and mighty Giant Redwood Forests in Northern part of the state. Now, as part of their reconciliation, they began to take car trips again which they found they still enjoyed. It had given them privacy in their former days and it still provided that now.

Nelson, ever watchful, had noticed that Jeanette's "Twin Gables" had fallen into some disrepair. He knew Gene was no handyman and disliked anything that might be considered manual labor, but Nelson enjoyed doing it. He made sure that the tools he had purchased for Jeanette years go were still stored in the garage. His first task and his love of gardening ensured that the beautiful rose garden he had planted years go, was soon restored to its former beauty.

Over time, he took care of many little repairs that had accumulated since they had been separated. In fact Twin Gables soon became far more a product of Jeanette and Nelson than it was ever Jeanette and Gene. Nelson took care of the exterior, Jeanette the interior similar to what they had at their "Mists" which Nelson had given up when he lost Jeanette. One can only imagine the agony Nelson went through when he decided to give up the lease on that property where their happiest days had been spent for about fifteen years! Without Jeanette, it had lost its meaning to him.

Far more quickly than they both realized, their reconciliation began to make them aware that their relationship had begun to flourish and thrive with this togetherness. It was not too long before they became intimate once again and remained lovers for the rest of their lives. This happened in spite of Nelson's new career that would take him on the road. With this change, Jeanette had her old Music House, located behind the main house, be remodeled into quarters for Nelson. She felt that visitors would not be aware of his presence in the house itself and yet they could be close together.

Nelson's decision to entertain in exclusive Dinner Clubs had been with his understanding that Jeanette would be his partner. Jeanette realized that her health was declining and she would not be able to withstand the stress of performing a demanding two shows a night with Nelson. It broke her heart to tell Nelson she could not do it.

He had to face the reality of her decision and he was extremely disappointed. He loved to sing to an audience and would never be content unless he could. That Jeanette definitely understood! He finally decided to perform as a single.

To make it easier for Nelson, he and Jeanette moved into his apartment he maintained in NYC. She tried to make a home for him despite his work and for the most part, it worked out. She made use of her time when he was away to improve the apartment. She bought a beautiful rocking chair for him which he enjoyed. He did complain that when he first sat in the chair, it was so darn cold! She immediately knit a warm cover for the back, the seat and the arms of the chair and then he loved it!

His act was a smash hit with the public but they kept clamoring for the famous old Jeanette and Nelson duets they remembered from their classic films.

It was going to require Nelson to find a soprano to work with him. It was his arranger, Harper McKay, who knew a young soprano who did have light opera experience and he thought she would work well with Nelson. At this time she was not up to Nelson's singing partner standards, but he was confident that Nelson could teach her to be a much better singer. Nelson accepted her and gave her the stage name of "Gale Sherwood".

To compensate for his being away, Nelson and Jeanette turned to the telephone as the means by which they could keep in touch. Jeanette loved the phone and Nelson was well aware of the importance of their phone calls between each other. He was always fretful about being able to take her calls or to make his! Even when he was fourteen thousand miles away in Australia, he knew how to time his calls so that she would be awake around ten in the morning at her home although he was actually calling her later the following day from Aussie land. He was always dressed in his tuxedo for the first of his two shows but he always made it a point to stop and call Jeanette just before the first show.

She, of course, lived her life around receiving his calls or making hers. Jeanette did not remain inactive in the early fifties. She made several Summer Stock appearances in week long runs of "Bittersweet" and even did performances of "The King and I" in the mid fifties until even that became too strenuous for her. She recognized that her health demanded that she retire from public life except for occasional appearances on Television.

When Nelson had a few days between engagements, he would fly back home to spend time with Jeanette which meant the world to her and to him. Jeanette always knew exactly where he was every day, and was able to make an occasional appearance at his shows. A few have been documented.

Nelson was always delighted when Jeanette was able to attend his show and they usually sang at least one number together. Gale, who understood the relationship between Nelson and Jeanette, would just slip away quietly and allow them to revel in being together! At the conclusion of their duet, Nelson would swoop Jeanette up in his arms and laughingly call out to his audience “Show’s Over Folks!” and they were not seen again.

On another occasion while she was visiting with friends in Ohio, Nelson was working at a posh dinner club in the same city. She and her friends went one evening to see his very popular show. Nelson did not know she was in the audience that evening. When his regular show was over, instead of Nelson departing, the lights were turned down and a huge photograph of Jeanette appeared on a screen. Apparently it was a special day that prompted Nelson to do this. It was a beautiful head shot of her from “Sweethearts”. Jeanette was startled! Then Nelson started singing “Pretty As a Picture”. Although the friends that were with Jeanette tried to restrain her, Jeanette could not contain herself and stood up and started towards Nelson as she sang the duet with him. They never missed a note, but he reached out for her as they finished the song together. The audience went wild with excitement at seeing and hearing both of these much adored artists.

Nelson also took opportunities when he had recording sessions to include special numbers with lyrics that spoke to Jeanette of his love for her. And, as they grew older, he would sing songs that emphasized the meaning of long existing love relationships. The meaning of these beautiful songs was very important to Nelson and Jeanette but their audiences rarely paid attention to the lyrics of the songs they sang to each other.

A wonderful example of a lovely song that Nelson would often sing to her would be the old classic favorite written by the Irish Poet, Thomas Moore (1779-1852). Nelson sang this song to Jeanette for one reason: to bolster her confidence in his love for her, no matter the effect of time on her beauty. He constantly reminded her: “Beauty was temporary...but HIS LOVE FOR HER WAS PERMANENT!”

Here is the lyric to this lovely poem.

“Believe Me if All Those Endearing Young Charms,  
Which I gaze on so fondly today,  
Were to change by tomorrow, and fleet in my arms,  
Like fairy gifts fading away,

Thou wouldst still be adored as this moment thou art,  
Let thy love-li-ness fade as it will,  
And around the dear ruin, each wish of my heart  
Would entwine itself verdantly still.

It is not while beauty and youth are thine own,  
And thy cheeks unprofaned by a tear,

That the fervor and faith of a soul can be known,  
To which time will but make thee more dear!

No, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,  
But as truly loves on to the close;  
As a sunflower turns on her god, when he sets,  
The same look which she turn'd when he rose.

Nelson, over the years, constantly re-enforced his love for Jeanette by downplaying the beauty factor and how, over time, it was a temporary condition. He emphasized that it was “HER” he loved.

Recall when he gave Jeanette the book “The Rosary”: He did read it to her when she returned from her concert tour. The main female character, “Jane”, was very “Plain” but a very artistic, intelligent woman that “Garth” loved. Jeanette always saw the story as being so close to their own lives. She saw herself as “Jane” and her Nels as “Garth”.

As the years went by, Gene became dissatisfied with the maintenance problems associated with Twin Gables. Nelson was very busy with his career and did not have a lot of time to devote to its upkeep. Built in the twenties, it was showing its age. It was also becoming difficult for Jeanette to manage the stairs outside and inside, and worse, it was interfering with Gene’s own lifestyle.

Gene began to badger Jeanette that they should put the property up for sale and arrange to move into an apartment. It was in the early sixties that Condos became fashionable but it was a question of buying it as a Condo homeowner or leasing an apartment. In West Los Angeles, a number of large apartment and condo buildings were springing up on Wilshire Boulevard that were spacious and comfortable and came with many amenities.

Such a place was The COMSTOCK Apartments. They were built in 1961 and were comprised of two high rise buildings. There were 19 floors in each building, which were side by side, identified as Comstock-East and Comstock-West. They were located in Westwood, on the Northwest corner of Comstock Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard. Entrance was from Comstock Avenue. On the Northeast side of Comstock Avenue was the Wilshire Country Club. Jeanette’s apartment had a view of Wilshire and Comstock. In actuality Jeanette leased two adjoining apartments; one for herself and one for Gene. This permitted him to come and go as he pleased even though he was supposed to be looking after Jeanette for which he access to her money.

Shortly after Jeanette moved into the Comstock-East, on the 8th floor, Nelson acquired a lease on an apartment in Comstock-West on the 7th floor. When he had a few days between engagements he would fly home and go directly from LAX to this apartment without his wife ever knowing he was in town. Sometimes he liked to make a surprise visit to Jeanette and she would scold him for not letting her know of his arrival and catch her unprepared, i.e. her hair not done. He was quickly forgiven. They were so happy

when they could spend time together. They never lost their capacity to talk for hours at a time! It was very lonely for her without his presence.

When he left, Jeanette would go to his apartment for which she had a key, and take care of seeing that his laundry was processed and any of his clothes that needed to go to the cleaners was done. If he needed any shopping, she did that for him also. When his things were returned she put everything away in his closet or chest of drawers. She loved to do it because it was another way to continue to be his wife. It also meant that when she knew he was coming home, she would see to it that his favorite food was in his fridge, freezer, or pantry! When he surprised her with a visit, he usually arrived with grocery bags in his arms. He could have arranged to have these chores done by the concierge services but he knew it meant more to his Jenny for her to do it.

Jeanette's sudden death stunned Nelson. He was not prepared for it. Nobody had told him that she had been sent to Houston to see her heart specialist. In fact, Nelson had spoken with Jeanette only a short time before she died. He explained to her that he was going to go ahead and purchase the house in Scottsdale and would very soon have enough money saved to acquire the property.

He had saved up the money to purchase the house once before only to learn that his "wife" had gained access to what was supposed to be a private account and had taken the money! After that terrible experience, he put Ted Paxson in charge of the money he saved, with the understanding that if Nelson died, that Ted could keep the money for himself. At least it would not fall into the hands of the woman who squandered Nelson's hard earned money on herself, her parents, and her son and his family, almost faster than he could produce it!

During his last conversation with Jeanette, Nelson, who loved to tease her, reminded her about the need to reduce the size of her wardrobe and especially the number of shoes she had because their new home was a less lavish abode than she was used to having! He also pointed out that they were not planning to have a live-in maid, but only one who came during the day. They wanted to be by themselves. Jeanette had no problem with Nelson's decision. She recalled living at Mist's without help in exactly the same circumstances and how happy they had been with the arrangement.

Then, sensing Jeanette's weakened state, he asked Jeanette again if she wanted him to stay home with her. He always asked her that question before he would leave. Had she been honest with him, there was no doubt that he would have arranged to cancel his engagement and stay with her. Instead, Jeanette told him to go ahead with his engagement and that she could easily wait for his return. What she did not tell him was that she knew it would be bad for his reputation to cancel engagements to which he was committed in terms of procuring future engagements. Of course, she was correct but we never know what the future has in store.

It was unfortunate that she gave him his leave. The feeling of guilt at Jeanette's loss certainly hastened Nelson's own demise. Although he could still perform for his

audience, the moment the show was over he retreated into a constant state of sorrow, sadness, and grief.

It was not until after Nelson's death that his secret apartment in Comstock-West was uncovered in settling his estate. Ann never knew of the existence of this apartment.

Both Nelson and Jeanette continued their mid-life careers but his was more structured and that he maintained his Dinner Club engagements whereas Jeanette did occasional performances of operettas.

In July of 1955, Jeanette did a week of the operetta "Bittersweet" and a party who knew all of the facts about the relationship, spent the week with Jeanette. Nelson was booked in La Vegas at this time. The evening after her second performance, she was extremely eager to get to her hotel because she told us that she had an important telephone call which she said was "coming through any minute" and she was in such a happy frame of mind that she was throwing kisses to all of us and said "I will see all of you longer tomorrow night". It is not too difficult to figure out from whom that telephone call was coming.

It is very important that you listen carefully to the exact words that are attributed to Jeanette or Nelson because they are their exact words.

They had been reconciled for about two and a half years at this point. Jeanette was doing enough Summer Stock work to keep her reputation as an operetta performer in tact. She could no longer physically handle the concert tour regimen and immediately after they reconciled she finished her last tour and never toured again. Her comments report her own personal feelings. It was disturbing to learn that our source failed to tell Nelson her precise tender words and paraphrased them instead.

On her closing night, they were alone with Jeanette and made a comment about Nelson. They told her that they missed Nelson and one said "I think I am going to have to go to Springfield and see him." Jeanette was briefly confused and said "Springfield?" Then Jeanette understood that they were talking about his August engagement in Springfield. They asked her about working again with Nelson and she replied:

"Oh! I am afraid we just can't – you see – he is happier this way".

Then she startled us by saying in that gentle little voice (of hers):

"If you do see him – give him my very best love, and tell him, I miss him!"

The party did go to Nelson's Springfield date. She had written to the management of the club asking for a reservation and a note to Nelson saying they would like to see him for a



few minutes. They had been acquainted with Nelson for a number of years. She described their reception as follows:

“They had the red carpet out for us (she and her husband). The head waiter had reserved a wonderful table – right off the dance floor and he knew Nelson was expecting us. He said to go over in the corner by the orchestra after the show and Nelson would be out to see us.

As for the show, she said she was sorry they had not seen it sooner. She continued that she did not have to tell anybody that neither the show or Nelson himself are even remotely like they sound in those darn club papers. The show is all very light and gaily done and the impression you get of Gale and Nelson together is exactly like father and daughter. That’s the way he acts toward her and she obviously has infinite respect for him and a little awe. They did not get a chance to meet her because she had an errand to run between shows.

She continues:

“The thing that floored her husband and herself was that Nelson is telling the world the Gospel truth!

I couldn’t believe my ears. It is just the same thing as he does when he says “my wife”, he means Jeanette, or “Mrs. Eddy”, he means the woman to whom he is married. Nelson talks for his own benefit and he can’t help it if he can’t explain it to other people.

Nelson saw the opportunity to convey to his audience what he always wanted to shout to the world; his love for Jeanette! He did it so cleverly without ever mentioning her name! It seems he managed to work in this dialogue into his first-time performances in a given venue. Listen very carefully to his words:

He walked out (on the stage) and said:

“There is always one unforgettable moment in every life. The moment when you first know it is LOVE.”

Then he goes on about “it maybe at a party, on a journey, etc. And then he says :

“But with ME, it was “Neath the Southern Moon”. Then Nelson sang that song.

Then, just in case anybody was stupid enough to think he means Ann, he says:

“One time I made a picture called “Naughty Marietta” – are any of you old enough to remember that?”

Of course there is much applause.

Then he said:

“After we had rescued the girls from the pirates, I turned around and there SHE was – and I had found the one thing I had been looking for all my life!”

Then he sang “Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life”.

There was no doubt that every one who heard Nelson’s words knew he was speaking of Jeanette.

Our source person thought his most beautiful song was “And This Is My Beloved” from Kismet”. This party said he really went to town on that poem (?) he recites before he sings it. That song, she felt, was just Nelson himself all over, the minute I heard it. The way Nelson sings it is magnificent!

Nelson had to apologize for being a bit late meeting our couple but he said he had to change into warmer clothes as the air conditioning bothered him after he had been singing under hot lights.

Nelson sat down at their table and he was very pleased when she told him about being at all five of Jeanette’s “Bittersweet” performances in July. Unfortunately this party opted not to deliver Jeanette’s message verbatim. Instead it lost something in the translation that “people backstage sent him their love and said to tell him they missed him”. It was unfortunate he did not hear Jeanette’s own tender words to him. Perhaps he could sense what she had probably said.

They chatted for a while when out of the blue he wistfully said: “So you were in Dallas” - as though the entire world had been in Dallas so far as he was concerned. They felt that all Nelson really wanted to do was to get back home, just as Jeanette was also eager to return home to California, where as she had said “the important people in her life were located.” Indeed, they were!

Nelson and Jeanette remained devoted lovers until death overtook them. Nelson was devastated at his “Baby’s” passing and although he struggled to keep working, his life was shattered by her loss. In the truest sense, Nelson emotionally died when Jeanette died. Nelson always considered that Jeanette was his “True Wife”, and he was Jeanette’s “True Husband”. They were as “married” as any two Soul Mates” could possibly be!

Their ability to overcome the many adversities they faced in this life is proof that a love as deep, profound and lasting as theirs far outweighed the difficulties they faced. Their happiness and love for one another that was so tangible and visible when we watched them on the screen, then and now, is proof that truly, Love Conquers All!

Nelson’s will to live was gone. One can easily imagine that when stricken with his fatal stroke that he made no effort to survive.

Both Ted and Gale had left the hospital the night before with the indication that he was stabilized only to arrive the next morning at 7:30 AM to witness his death. Ted and Gale both thought Nelson had resolved to leave this earth so that he could be with the woman he loved. After all these years, life without her was not to him, worth living! The only thing we can be certain of was that at least Nelson did not pass alone and he was with two people who really did care about him. We can only pray that they are still together in whatever realm our Divine Father provides for Lovers such as these.

When Gale Sherwood was questioned about Nelson after Jeanette's death, her response said it all:

"Nelson was never the same after Jeanette's death, and I doubt he ever will be."

When the news of Jeanette's passing reached Ralph Edwards, he arranged to have the episode of his famous TV program "THIS IS YOUR LIFE, JEANETTE MacDONALD" repeated and many people who had not seen the show back on November 12, 1952 had the opportunity to see this famous "Reconciliation" of Jeanette and Nelson for themselves. Over the years, Edwards edited out all commercials from his most successful "This Is Your Life" episodes, among them the one of Jeanette and Nelson. Audiences then had the opportunity to often see this "Reconciliation" program again.

[After this presentation, we will present two DVD's. One from the original "THIS IS YOUR LIFE, JEANETTE MacDONALD" The first DVD is the complete TV Program, with the commercials edited out by Ralph Edwards. The second DVD is just the sequence with Nelson and Jeanette but in slow-motion and without sound. This is followed by several Pause Still Photos from the slow-motion and each is displayed for about 10 seconds so that these scenes can be viewed more closely.]

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

This concludes our Presentation about this momentous event in the lives of Nelson and Jeanette. Without Nelson's perseverance in trying to reconnect with the love of his life, and the understanding and loyalty of Blossom, this reconciliation may never have taken place. Instead, Nelson carefully and lovingly restored their lives together. He renewed Jenny's faith in her love for him and as he often said, he had never, ever, lost his love for her.

Nelson had told her very early in their life together, that she was the only woman he would ever love. That statement she knew was truthful and it sustained her through the wonderful times and the difficult ones. We are so fortunate to have the video of this show and how it brought great happiness to both of them as they lived out their final years together. We hope that the story behind the video is understood, and the special insight into the restoration of their lifelong love for each other is brought to life!

This was their life – Jeanette's and Nelson's!