



MYRTLE RUTH VARNON CALE

November 16, 2020

Myrtle Ruth Varnon Cale was born October 17, 1925 in Ensley, Alabama to Myrtle Ireland Varnon and Reid Varnon.

And so the birth certificate reads.

Yet there persists a compelling alternate narrative that on that day Myrtle and Reid happened to notice a strange light in the sky. They made their way toward it and were astonished to find in a remote field an infant girl, cooing and burbling happily, sitting beside the wreck of a crashed spaceship.

Strange runes on the alien craft would eventually be deciphered, revealing that it, carrying its precious cargo, had been launched from a distant dying world just prior to its final, fiery end.

The kindly Varnon couple took the pretty infant into their home and loved her as their own.

They soon came to discover that the foundling had acquired superpowers upon entering Earth's atmosphere: Beauty, Wisdom, Spiritual Fortitude, and Feminine Grace.

These formidable powers would serve her well in her many tireless quests, all her long life. In her secret identity as mild-mannered Alabamian lovely, her inner gifts would further reveal themselves, for she proved a brilliant student, a devoted wife, a loving mother, loyal friend to many, and a devout Methodist.

Meantime, in her superheroine guise, she would ever remain a staunch defender of truth, justice, and the American way.

Not long after their amazing discovery, the Varnons moved from Ensley to Sandusky, Alabama, probably to further obscure the true origin of the lovely, mysterious child's secret identity. Reid worked at TCI and Myrtle was a homemaker.

Ruth had one sibling, Martha Sue Varnon Raines, born in 1923. Both girls were attractive and popular, and Sue was as blonde as Ruth was brunette.

There was in those days a certain sports figure of some notoriety who was called “the Babe.” Inevitably, the younger Varnon daughter was called “Baby Ruth.” That moniker stayed with her even into her college years.

The Varnon family attended Sandusky First Methodist Church, where Ruth was baptized at the age of seven. When she was 14, she was chosen to portray Mother Mary in the church’s annual Christmas pageant. Years later, in the mid-1960s, Ruth once again was chosen to portray Mary, mother of Jesus, in the Christmas pageant held in the old sanctuary of the Hueytown First Methodist Church.

When she was 15, she had a date with a boy who took her to the Cale Pharmacy in nearby Pratt City, where they shared an ice cream sundae at the soda fountain. That was where Ruth first noticed the handsome soda jerk, a student at Birmingham-Southern College, who was working for his father, the pharmacist who owned and operated the drug store.

Ruth attended Minor High School. In her Junior year she was a cheerleader. In her Senior year she played clarinet in the school band. She had the lead female role in the school play that year. The male lead asked to drive her home. When they arrived at the house, he gave Ruth her first kiss. By chance, Ruth’s mother Myrtle and Myrtle’s sister Catherine Hallmark happened to see it. Said Catherine to Myrtle: “Well, that little dickens!”

Ruth had her first job while in high school. She worked for an attorney. One day the lawyer tossed her the keys to his car and told her to drive some papers to the courthouse. The car had a double-clutch transmission. Ruth had never driven a car before. She was terrified to drive it, but she was more terrified to say NO to the lawyer. Summoning her superpower of inner confidence, she made the drive to the courthouse and back to the lawyer’s office without mishap.

At age 16, Ruth had a blind date with a young man who, she quickly realized, was the handsome soda jerk at the Cale Pharmacy. For his part, the attractive college senior remembered the beautiful girl he had served ice cream to. He casually mentioned that he had just received his acceptance letter from Tulane School of Medicine. The date must have gone pretty well, for they began to see each other regularly. Together, they were a striking couple.

After graduating from Minor High, Ruth attended Birmingham-Southern College. Attractive, smart, and popular, she joined the Alpha Chi Omega sorority.

When she was part-way through college, the handsome young fellow, a soda jerk no longer but now a man in full nearing completion of his medical studies, asked Ruth to accompany him to New Orleans. Somehow Robert T. Cale (Sr.) talked Myrtle and Reid into letting their younger daughter make the trip unchaperoned to a place regarded by many as Sin City.

It was on that first trip to New Orleans that Robert took Ruth to a fine restaurant, presented her with an engagement ring, and proposed marriage.

Ruth always said, "Even then I knew him well enough to know that If I said 'No' he would never ask again." It was not an easy decision, for the beautiful coed had other suitors. After a slight hesitation, she said 'Yes' and in that moment the planet shifted slightly on its axis.

Robert completed medical school after only three years – it was an accelerated course of study because it was the last days of World War II, and there was great need of physicians for the Allied war effort.

The newly minted M.D. and the blushing maiden were wed on 25 January 1946 at the Sandusky First Methodist Church. They honeymooned in New Orleans (where else?), and one night they recognized Babe Ruth leaving their hotel through the revolving door as they were walking in. "I could have reached out and touched him," Ruth always said afterward.

Times were hard, and the young wife dropped out of college to support her new husband and herself. Many years later, when her sons were grown, she returned to Birmingham-Southern and graduated cum laude with a BA degree in religion. She participated in graduation ceremonies with the class of 1981, but by her request she is listed as an alumnus of what would have been her own graduating class if she had not been forced to take a thirty-three-year sabbatical, 1948. The Cale family still have her senior thesis, on the subject of John Wesley, founder of Methodism. Her main professor of religion, Dr. Roy Wells, must have been impressed, for he gave the paper a grade of A+. Indeed, in one place he wrote in red pencil: "I did not know that!"

Ruth enjoyed an active civic life as well. She served as Sunday school teacher and

church secretary at Hueytown First Methodist. She was a member of the Methodist Women's Auxiliary service organization. When her boys were young, she was a Cub Scout Den Mother. She and her husband, whom she called "Torrance" but whom everybody else called "Doc," were in a bowling league at Holiday Bowl, located on what was in those days called the Bessemer Superhighway. They joined Birmingham's The Club in the early 1960s, and Ruth continued to pay membership dues until the day she died. Ruth was an active member of the Hobby Club for many years. She loved bridge and was an enthusiastic member of a bridge club for as long as her health permitted. She read the bridge columns in the newspaper into her 90s, when her vision gave out.

More than anything else, Ruth devoted her love and most of her time to her family. She was a wonderful mother to her two sons: Robert Torrance Cale Jr. M.D., born 4 November 1948 (daughter-in-law Mrs. Lynn S. Cale), and Thomas Varnon Cale, born 24 August 1951. The first son, nicknamed "Terry" was born in Gadsden. Not long after, the family moved to 310 South Parkway in Hueytown.

Ruth dreamed for many years of having a beautiful house, so she collected countless pictures and articles clipped from magazines. In the fullness of time, Ruth and Doc built their dream home at Lakeview Estates, Hueytown, and moved there. Ruth lived in her beloved Fortress of Solitude from the summer of 1968 until the day she died.

Ruth's parents owned a tiny cottage in Foley, Alabama, so the Cales were able to stay there on summer vacations at Gulf Shores. Eventually, Ruth and Doc built a beach house on the shoreline of west beach. Designed and built by Ruth's nephew Joe Reid Raines, the beach house was beautiful and distinctive.

Despite such an idyllic-sounding life, Ruth bravely endured many sufferings. The loss of her parents was a grievous blow. Many years ago she was attacked by a deadly archenemy, acoustic neuroma. She survived a dangerous brain surgery to remove the right auditory nerve, the only treatment for that life-threatening tumor. She survived the procedure, but suffered total deafness and partial facial paralysis on that side. On a later occasion, Ruth fell, suffering fractures of her left hip and wrist.

Ruth's devoted life partner died suddenly on 10 October 2000, felled by a catastrophic acute intracerebral hemorrhage. They happened to be at their beach house in Gulf Shores, and Doc died doing one of the things he loved best – telling a workman how to do his job. Bereft of her other half, Ruth endured for twenty more years the inner pain of grief and loneliness.

About 2010, at the age of 85, she was besieged by her greatest arch-foe, Lymphoma. Her primary care physician predicted she would live six months. The superheroine summoned all her strength and courage and endured for ten more years, during which she suffered greatly from many complications arising from the terrible disease.

The aging superheroine's faith never wavered. She loved to read, but when even that enjoyment was denied her, she asked sitters, friends, and visitors to read to her from the Bible or from one of her many devotional books.

For Ruth there was no question – she would not countenance the notion of entering a nursing home. Summoning up the last of her waning inner stores of courage and determination, Ruth remained in her own beautiful home until the end.

Ruth is survived by her two sons; by her three grandchildren, Jennifer Ruth Cale, Robert Torrance Cale III, and Heather Anne Cale M.D.; and by her great granddaughter, nine-year-old Lily Grace Bessette.

Yet her legacy endures. The medical profession has been enriched by the Cale family. Doc's father was a pharmacist during the days when pharmacists were called "Doctor." Terry practices medicine in Kalispell, Montana. Heather is thus the fourth consecutive generation of "Doctor Cale." A couple of months before her death, Ruth was delighted to learn that Heather passed the big national exam (on the first try), earning her Internal Medicine Board Certification.

Some have called Ruth and Doc "the last of the true Southern aristocrats." Remarkably, they were never impressed by wealth or rank. In their eyes, what counted was what lived in people's hearts and souls.

Ruth Varnon Cale, having shed so much light in this world, now returns to the open arms of the very Source and Seat of Light itself.

It is now time to dispel a rumor. There is a story being circulated that Ruth and her greatest arch-enemy, Lymphoma, locked in a death embrace, died in a mutual tumble from Reichenbach Falls.

No. This is false.

It is true enough that the superheroine and her deadliest foe perished together. But I, her

elder son, who held her hand as her mortal frame breathed its last, can attest that she returned to the stars, from whence she came, filled with the peace she so emanated to all those around her throughout her long and triumphant life. She was in the place she cherished best, enveloped in the hearts of those who loved her, and surrounded by many mementos of her countless superheroine exploits.

There happens to be another superheroine of my acquaintance, one possessing the super power of Inner Sight, who reports that Ruth was met at the airport in Heaven by her loyal husband Doc, driving a brand-spanking-new astral replica of the baby-blue Cadillac coupe – the one with the huge tailfins – that he gave Ruth, much to her delighted surprise, in 1959. They then departed happily together to their heavenly mansion, hand-in-hand.

But I am a mere mortal. I cannot see such things. All I know is that Ruth, my dear mother, is no longer here, and this world is just a little bit darker.

The visitation will be Sunday, November 22, 2020, from 12:00 PM until 1:00 PM, at Hueytown First United Methodist Church. The Funeral Service will be at 1:00 PM at the Church, with Rev. John Simmons and Rev. John Verciglio officiating. Burial will follow at Elmwood Cemetery.

Comments



“ 17 files added to the album Ruth Cale



Robert T. Cale - November 20, 2020 at 09:38 AM