

# True Love

By Sue Mayfield Geiger

*Sasee Magazine Feb. 2013*



**The day of Clark Gable’s funeral, my mother wore black.** We lived a thousand miles from Hollywood, but she mourned as if she were part of the crowd paying tribute to her idol. She saw practically every movie he made and watched “Gone with the Wind” at least 20 times. She often recited famous lines from that epic film; her favorite one being, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.” She especially used that a lot when responding to someone’s frivolous conversation.

During the 1930s, all teenage girls went to the picture show, like today’s teenagers who frequent the mall. From the first time mom saw Clark Gable on the screen, she was in love. He was her dreamboat, her knight in shining armor, her boyfriend, her future husband. We all have fantasies and Mr. Gable was hers. Even after my mom married my dad, she did not hide the fact that her heart belonged to Clark. Dad didn’t mind—he often humored her about his own fascination with Jane Russell, and they’d laugh about what they’d do if they ever met their make-believe lovers.

Dad came home one day with a fake mustache on and grabbed mom from behind while she was washing dishes. She turned around and saw that hairy lip and just shook her head.

When my parents saw the movie “Mogambo” with Clark Gable, Ava Gardner and Grace Kelly, the whole dynamics changed. “Wow, that Ava Gardner is something else,” dad said, going on about her sex appeal and what a vamp she was. Mom said Gardner was nothing compared to Grace Kelly who had style and sophistication. “There’s no comparison,” dad said, telling mom how Gardner was a hot siren compared to Kelly’s prim and proper persona. But what did it matter? Mom was there to see her loverboy and not the female co-stars.

Yet as the weeks went on, dad talked more and more about Ava Gardner and that he no longer cared for Jane Russell. Ava was his new gal. “You’re not her type,” mom would say reminding dad that Ava had even been married to Frank Sinatra.

“Well,” dad said, “Clark was married to Carol Lombard, so what makes you think you’re his type?”

And so the banter would continue, but with loving jest. My parents were wild about each other and their movie star chatter was just that—all talk. But as I grew older I saw how important it was to kid around in relationships, how comedic conversation was important to any couple’s day-to-day routine. Dad was a welder and mom worked at the school cafeteria so they came home tired everyday with sore feet and weary bones. Yet instead of complaining about the poor

existence of their lives, they made it a point to joke, clown around, laugh and tease. You might call it an alternative to Prozac back in the day when there was not a pill for everything.

So, the mourning of Gable's death was a given. And when dad came home and saw mom in her black dress, he was a bit surprised. "Clark died today," mom told him. Of course, the news of Gable's heart attack had been on television the days preceding his death, but everyone thought he had recovered.

"I'm sorry to hear that," dad said, who walked over to mom and embraced her. She put a handkerchief up to her cheek as she sniffed and talked about what a great actor he was and how she would miss him. "So, now I don't have to worry about you running off with him any longer," said dad.

"No," mom said, "'cause I made up my mind a long time ago that if I had to choose between you and Clark, I knew who it would be."

Dad knew too. He didn't have to ask—he knew.