

Dwight Moody

The Return of the Ring

I was standing in the hallway of the funeral home looking at pictures of Ora Ruth Taylor Dundon Gillespie when her son Bill appeared beside me. He pulled out of his pocket a black jeweler's box and opened it for my inspection.

It was the ring.

Ruth had given it to her first husband as a wedding gift, neatly inscribed "Larry-Ruth 10-21-39."

The war came, and Larry joined the Army Air Corps. He was wearing the ring when his B-17 went down en route to England.

Two years later, the young widow Ruth met and married Woodward Gillespie, and they became the parents of four children, including the one who stood beside me holding the boxed ring in his hand.

The ring had lain buried in the tangled wreckage on an Irish hillside until amateur scavenger Alfred Montgomery discovered it in 1993.

United States military records helped Montgomery track the name to the Louisville house built by the American couple in 1941—and still inhabited by the twice-widowed woman at the time of her death. His inquiry through the *Courier-Journal* inspired columnist Bob Hill to write about Ruth, Larry and the long lost ring.

Ruth read the paper, dialed the overseas number listed there, and calmly said to the Irish stranger, "I believe you have my wedding ring."

In July 1993, scores of people gathered in the Baptist Tabernacle of West Louisville to witness the return of the ring.

It inspired a second newspaper column, a *People* magazine article and a documentary on the British Broadcasting Corporation.

And now, coming soon to network television, a movie starring Gene Hackman and Shirley McClain—but with the story line spruced up, I am told, by a fictitious romance between the Irishman and the daughter of the original couple. It remains to be seen whether my friend Bill or his father Woody find a place in the script or on the screen.

An interesting story, it is, and full of poignancy and possibilities. Who knows, it could win an Emmy!

But even as I stood in the hallway of the funeral home looking at the ring, twisted and tarnished and loosely displayed in the velvet-covered box, I wondered if celluloid would tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about the woman who first selected the ring for her fiance.

For there on the funeral home's display board was the rest of the story: documents, pictures and memorabilia of an unusual woman. And not only there, but also in the witness of her son, and later in the public testimony of the minister.

Character, ability and social engagement for the common good—in church, school and community, in Louisville, throughout the state and around the world, from the very beginning right up to the very end.

"I had never seen a person die," Bill said to me about the end.

But he had seen her live—and no doubt wondered with me if the remarkable story that deserved to be told would be the same as the one enacted on screen.

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