

Meet me in St. Louis

By D. A. Sharpe

I - Introduction

This story is about meeting my wife, Suzanne Margaret Boggess Sharpe, and the early influences in each of our lives that prepared us to meet each other in 1962 when we were ages 23 and 24, and were groomed just right to be a fit for each other, in God's good providence. We did not meet in St. Louis, but rather in New Orleans. We did live in St. Louis as a family 1972-1982, and garnered many fond memories there. However, this title was selected, because it symbolizes the character of both of us being drawn to romance, music, and live-happily-ever-after stories. To this day, both Suzanne and I sink into deep mutual love and enjoyment for each other whenever we view a story that embellishes love and/or music. That's why among our favorites are the stories seen on the Hallmark Hall of Fame TV Channel, especially the ones by that wonderfully creative Jewish man, Larry Levinson and his co-producer, Robert Halmi, Jr. Their feature length films, though not musical, really create the most heart-string-pulling emotions that we have enjoyed.

Meet Me in St. Louis is the very first musical and romantic movie I ever saw as a young boy. The whole idea of that joyous set of songs, and such an intriguing love story totally captured my interests. I'd never experienced such fun and winsomeness.



Meet Me in St. Louis is the 1944 musical film from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer which tells the story of an American family living in St. Louis at the time of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition World's Fair in 1904. It stars Judy Garland, Margaret O'Brien, Mary Astor, Lucille Bremer, Tom Drake, Leon Ames, Marjorie Main, June Lockhart, and Joan Carroll.

The movie was the second-highest grossing picture of the year, only behind *Going My Way*.

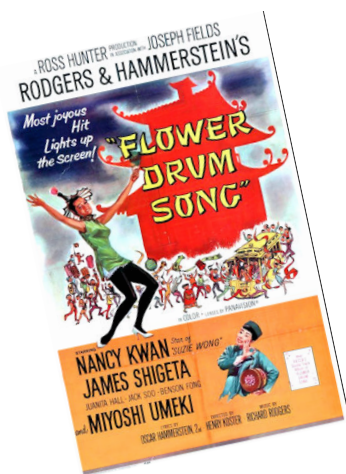
Garland debuted the musical standards *The Trolley Song*, *The Boy Next Door*, and *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*, all of which became musical hits after the film was released. Arthur Freed, the producer of the film, also wrote and performed one of the songs.

Of added interest is that when we did live in St. Louis, and Suzanne was a licensed realtor, her real estate office was right in the vicinity of the neighborhood where the story of *Meet Me in St. Louis* took place.

My attraction to this form of romance and music further encouraged my young manhood imaginations with the advents of subsequent musical films, *Singing in the Rain* (1952), *Oklahoma* (1955) and *South Pacific* (1958). In fact, the very first occupation I ever envisioned as a young boy was to become a professional dancer, after I watched Gene Kelly singing with



such vigor in the rain! *Flower Drum Song* (1958) was the first Broadway musical that I viewed live on stage. It was on a date I had with my friend, Miss Judy Shoup, at Texas State Fair Auditorium in Dallas during



my freshman year in college. In fact, the State Fair of Texas was the site of my very first date with any young lady, Miss June Wilson, which was on public school day, dismissed for the Fair in 1955, my sophomore year in high school! And that very same auditorium was where my 1957 Woodrow Wilson High School graduation ceremony took place. So, the Texas State Fair grounds was the site of a lot of fond and romantic memories for me as a boy and as a young man.

This next section is telling about Suzanne's growing up and her preparation for our meeting.

II - Suzanne



Suzanne Margaret Boggess was born in Griffin, Georgia in April 1938. Her parents were Thomas Shelton Boggess, Jr. (1912-2010) and Alice Loraine McElroy (1914-1994). Though Suzanne's father was raised in Macon, Noxubee County, Mississippi, his education to become a biochemist, graduating with bachelor's and master's degrees, was at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge and in New Orleans. It was the national economic depression that cut short his almost completed PhD in Chemistry at

LSU Medical School. It was at LSU in Baton Rouge that he met Alice, the Yankee girl from Ottumwa, Iowa. They married in 1935.

This biochemistry profession is what had led him to Georgia, working for the University of Georgia's Chemistry Department at its Experiment Stations in Griffin and in Tifton.

In 1947, when Suzanne was nine years old, her grandfather beckoned the family to come back to Noxubee County, Mississippi, and to take up farming, adjacent to his farm.

Farming was the family tradition. Suzanne was raised there through her departure to the University of Southern Mississippi in the fall of 1958.

It was during these years of elementary through high school in Macon that she developed talents of being trained in musical instruments and especially in vocal training. As I learned later, she sang like a beautiful blue bird!



Her disciplinarian music teacher for most of those years was Mary Lillian Peters Ogden Whitten. Mrs. Whitten was a private tutor, she was the high school band director and the First Baptist Church music department Director. Her forte was instilling passion and discipline into her students!

It was also during these years that Suzanne engaged in her Christian life, making a Christian commitment at her First Baptist Church circa 1948. Particularly influential on the Christian growth of Suzanne was her Pastor, Brother Pearson and her parents. Suzanne told me that it was during those years that she heard God say to her that she would marry a tall, skinny, Presbyterian minister's son.



Suzanne, with her musical talents growing, developed interest in up east universities whose musical reputations were among the elite. At some point, it is said that Suzanne's father put his foot down about all of this "up east" business. What is especially telling as to Suzanne's character and integrity is that she willingly obeyed her father's preferences, and discontinued her up east pursuits! It was a particular good thing for me, as she needed to be where our paths eventually crossed!

Though Suzanne started college majoring in music, that major became changed into biology, and her graduation equipped her to be a Medical Technologist, graduating in 1961. Actually, her senior college year was spent on the scene at the world-famous Oschner Clinic in Jefferson Parish, just outside New Orleans. After graduating, she took a position in New Orleans at Mercy Hospital. It was during those times that she joined Canal Street Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, a church with a decidedly Evangelical bent on a seriousness about being disciples of Jesus. The Jesus Movement was taking on momentum in those days.

Suzanne's musical talents were used as a regular soloist in the Chancel Choir for Sunday worship services. The pastor was the Rev. Dr. Robert A. Pitman, who became a mentor for Suzanne.

Actually, it turned out, Pitman had met my Presbyterian Pastor father while Pitman was a pastor in Lufkin, Texas. Suzanne became active at the Canal Street Presbyterian Church in what was named the College & Career group, led by a petroleum engineer and his wife, Mr. & Mrs. Theodore (Ted) McFarland.

At some point, Suzanne met and began dating a Tulane Medical School student who'd immigrated to the United States from behind one of the European Iron Curtin countries. Not only was he (I'm leaving him unnamed in this story on purpose) a bright student, but also he was part of the military resistance to the Communist Party dominating his home area. He was forced to escape his homeland. As it turned out, though he had a connection with the Roman Catholic Church growing up back home, apparently it just was a cultural attribute, and he did not profess to believe in God.

As Suzanne became serious in this dating relationship, with marriage in mind, Dr. Pitman had occasion to advise Suzanne. The long and the short of it was that Pitman advised Suzanne to avoid entering a marriage where she would be unequally yoked with an unbeliever (non-Christian).

At some point, Suzanne and her "intended" made a trip to the family farm in Noxubee County to meet her parents and grandfather (Grandmother Boggess already was deceased by then). From the stories I heard later, there was not much family enthusiasm in Suzanne's getting married to this X@#%& foreigner! Well, it is what it is!

In June of 1962, the student took a summer medical job out of state for the summer.

Suzanne made plans to host a social at her newly rented apartment on Sunday evening, June 17, 1962. There would be something like 12 or 15 people there. It's here that this part of Suzanne's story pauses, and mine takes up.

III - D. A.

I am Dwight Albert Sharpe, known to family and friends as “D. A.” My birth was in June 1939 in Ballenger, Runnels County, Texas where my father was Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. Like Suzanne, I was raised in a very Christian-oriented family. I never knew what it was not to believe in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ. I did have my share of back sliding over the growing up years, but there was never any doubt in my mind of the reality of the presence of God. I would just feel guilty from time to time, knowing that I should realize and incorporate into my life what it was that I believed.



My actual verbal confession of faith to accept Jesus Christ was in Houston, Texas on Palm Sunday, March 18, 1951, along with a half dozen or so other fellow students at Trinity Presbyterian Church, where Dad was the Pastor. That worked toward the inevitability that Suzanne and I would have for each other.



In the summer of 1951, Dad received a call as pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in Sweetwater, Texas, which was during my junior high school years.

In 1954, he became pastor of the John Knox Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas. It was in these high school days that my social life began to take shape. Besides learning a work ethic at Wyatt Food Stores as a stock boy and cash register checker, the usual round of dating events took place, mostly to venues such as movie theaters, occasional school dances, etc. These were times when my initial real life romantic emotions began to be experienced.



In the photograph with me is Steve Green, my friend from church who also worked at Wyatt's as a cashier. Dick White, a fellow competitor for the attentions of the same young lady as was I during those years, was also a friend and fellow cashier at the store. Both of those friends became medical doctors and life-long friends of mine.

My first college experience was at Austin College, Sherman, Texas, and a private college in the Presbyterian family. After attending my freshman and sophomore years (1957-1959), funds ran low at those private school rates. My transfer to the public University of Texas in Austin, Texas, was where my education was, graduating in 1962 with a BBA degree in the School of Business. Working hard, I did in four years of college course work being completed in only five years!

It was at this point that my headstrong intentions began to run afoul with what I later discerned was God's plan for my life. Landing professional employment with IBM, which at that time was THE leading computing company in the world, I was set for a high-tech career. Wanting to be located in Texas, at least, and preferably in Dallas, the place where already-established social connections awaited, my new employer promised to work toward that goal. However, three days prior to whenever it was that I was to appear for work at the new job, they told me to go to New Orleans!

That was about one of the last places I would think about wanting to go, to say the very least! All of my worldly goods were packed into my new four-door Chevy Belair sedan, and arrived on Friday, June 1. I was to report to work on Monday, June 4. Over the weekend a rented room was landed at 201 S. Gayoso St., four blocks from the new office.

Arriving at the new office was a good occasion. The folks welcomed me with really positive experiences. I was going to become an IBM Salesman, which, in those days, was really supposed to be something!

However, outside of the people met in the office, there was no one in New Orleans of whom I could think that I knew.

Then, later in the week, I learned that my friend, a Texas boy I'd known from Austin College days, Jim Walls, was in New Orleans, working in a management program at J. C. Penney Department Store! He was quickly located, and our friendship renewed. He told me he was getting married on June 23 in Dallas to Carol Schoeneck, a Dallas girl whom I'd also known at Austin College. He was leaving New Orleans for the wedding preparations on June 18.



I insisted that he try to introduce me, socially, to some people before leaving, if at all possible. Then he told me about three career girls who had lived close to his store that he'd met in the context of their shopping there. They were Suzanne, Waynette Norman and Merely, whose surname, unfortunately, I do not now recall. They'd just moved in different directions, and one of them (Suzanne) was hosting an apartment-warming social at her new location, to be on Sunday evening, June 17. He'd been invited, and suggested that I crash the party with him! It was a challenge, which could not be ignored.

IV - D. A. & Suzanne Meet

On that fateful Sunday evening June 17, 1962, Jim brought me into that social scene, even with me being his uninvited friend! We were welcomed with cheers and began to enjoy the occasion. Suzanne was a winsome host and easily put me at ease as an unexpected guest. The apartment was near Old City Park at 813 Alexander Street on the top floor of a three-story apartment house.



It really was good therapy for me to begin meeting some really fun and nice people. During the course of the evening, I learned that Suzanne's "engagement" boyfriend was working out of town for the summer. It seemed harmless to me to flirt with her, as she was real cute, and I assumed there was no real "danger" to me! Much to my delight, in the course of the evening there amongst all those people, I made a pass at her, and actually we kissed! WOW, did I feel bold, even in a roomful of people!

What I did not know was that she was remembering earlier of years back about marrying a tall, skinny Presbyterian Pastor's son. This entire set of facts she had had occasion to learn that evening was applicable about me! I am convinced that God's providence includes bringing things in our recollections that later serve us well.

It seems proper for me to interject at this point in the story that, though we both experienced a whirlwind courtship that was to result in marriage 105 days later; it must be said that we do not recommend such a flash schedule! Even though, as this story is being written, we've been happily and successfully married for over 52 years, we believe more time getting to know other's families would be much more wise and satisfying.

OK! With that said, we shall move on to what was becoming the most exhilarating and excitingly fun set of circumstances that I'd ever seen in my life!

After my friend, Jim, left town for his wedding preparations, I had at last met some friends. Jim was marrying Carol, a girl I'd known at Austin College, and I knew also her twin sisters, a year younger than her, who were students at Austin College.

However, not being alert enough to acquire contact information about any of them at the party, the only one I could contact was Suzanne, since the party was at her place! Actually, she was the only one for whom there was any interest in seeing again, anyway!

Creating casual occasions that week to "drop by" to say "hi," I managed to see her several times, actually getting her to agree to a date for the movies that Friday evening, June 22nd. We went to see *Elephant Walk*. I can't remember why in the world that movie was chosen, as it was about three years old. It was a movie about Africa, somewhat based on a romance, but ended by a herd of elephants destroying the place they lived. It wasn't exactly a live-happily-ever-after experience. However, Elizabeth Taylor, as lead actress, was a drawing card. After the movie, we went to a restaurant for a bite to eat.



This is where our lives began to change and turn in really different directions! Little did I know! Finishing our meal, Suzanne began to express her disappointment that none of her recent roommates, all of who were good friends of Jim's, wanted to go to Dallas for the wedding, whereas she did want to go! My mind began wandering about imagining getting her to my old hometown of Dallas!

The next thing I knew, almost without thinking, the words slipped out of my mouth that I would take her!

Much to my surprise, this wild girl said she'd go, if I'd drive her there! I could not believe my ears, but was too shy to back out at that late point! This was about 10:30 PM Friday evening. I took her to her apartment to pack. Then I rushed to my place to pack.

My sister, her husband and family lived in Dallas, so I figured on our landing at their place for lodging. However, I decided not to phone them at 11:00 PM at night. I'd phone them in the morning when we arrived, probably close to noon. There were no cell phones in those days. Just pay phones at places like grocery stores or gasoline stations, etc.

The Eisenhower Interstate Highway System had been started in 1954 (How many of you knew that is the official name of the system)? However, there was no Interstate Highway in 1962 from New Orleans to Dallas just yet. It was 500+ miles of mostly two-lane highway. That's a good 12-hour drive, through the night when we were both tired ... having both worked at our jobs all day Friday! We did take turns driving.

There is another element that was true then. The only credit cards existing in those days were for gasoline filling station purchases and department store credit cards. There were no Visa or Master Cards, etc., good for a wide variety of vendors. Unwisely, after we hit the highway at about 11:00 PM, we took inventory, and learned that we only had \$35 cash between us, and only one Gulf Oil gasoline credit card! Well, at least we could get there with plenty of Gulf Oil stations along the highways in those days! We could eat on snacks and reception goodies at the wedding, so the \$35 should get us through.

No answering of the phone at my sister's home when we arrived in Dallas, so we drove to their home. It did not take long to learn from neighbors that the whole family was gone on vacation, and there was no access into the house, even if we had wanted to stay, uninvited!

The next thought was my friend, Dick White. We'd worked in high school at Wyatt's Food Stores as cashiers, and we'd roomed together at the University of Texas part of the time. We'd worked together two summers at Camp Long, an athletic camp for kids. We'd even competed for the affections of the same young lady in high school days, Judy Shoup. Dick's parents lived near my sister's home, so we went there, 2736 Ripplewood Drive. Dick still was at school, as he graduated a year later than did I. His parents and younger brother (David, still in high school at the time) were glad to see us. When we explained our dilemma, they gladly said we could lodge at their home! What wonderful friends!

Younger brother David helped me unload the luggage from the car. As we gathered things, he made the comment that he really thought Suzanne was a beautiful young lady, and wondered just how long we'd dated. I thought he was going to drop his eyeglasses off his face when I informed him that this was our first date, and we'd had no plans to come to Dallas!

The Whites graciously provided a nice lunch for us. Knowing that we would need to nap most of the afternoon to recover from the rigors of the long drive, I phoned Carol's sisters to learn where the wedding reception would be. Having previously known their family, I already knew their church was Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church. So, I said nothing about the wedding location. We did ask her sisters not to say we were coming, as our presence was intended to be a surprise!

After a good afternoon's nap, we were refreshed and dressed for the wedding festivities. We appeared in this well-appointed church sanctuary, decorated to the hilt with wedding materials. Being ushered up close to the front, we realized that we would not know much in the way of people in the audience. When the pastor, the groom and best

man were the first of the wedding party to appear in the sanctuary, it quickly became evident that Suzanne and I had come to the wrong wedding!



We didn't know what to do, as the wedding process was beginning. We sat there through the entire wedding, consoled, at least, that we had the location of the after wedding reception. What we discovered later is that this wedding claimed the place on the church schedule before the Schoeneck-Walls wedding requested a schedule. Our friends' wedding had been scheduled at the near-by Southern Methodist University chapel. We'd just had no idea that we should have inquired!

We arrived at the reception location, fortunately earlier than any others arrived. It was lots of fun to greet Jim and Carol, the first arrivals, as they emerged from their chauffer-driven automobile. They were favorably shocked to see us there, and it was a wonderful surprise to have for them.

We enjoyed the rest of the evening, with my seeing a number of previously known friends from Austin College, etc. Of course, the only person there that Suzanne knew was Jim! We had fun, at any rate.

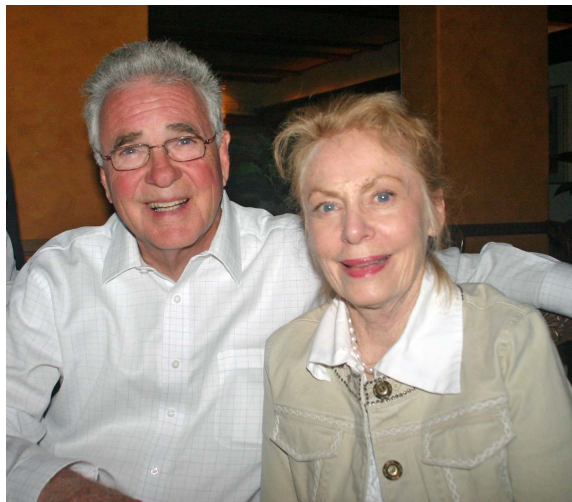
My next shock took place about 9:00 PM when Suzanne told me that she was a soloist at her Canal Street Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, and that she was scheduled to sing a solo at their 11:00 AM service the next morning! WOW! I had assumptions we'd have a good night's rest in Dallas, then take a relatively leisurely drive back to New Orleans during the day Sunday! All of those thoughts simply evaporated! We made a quick unplanned departure from the reception and headed for the White's home to change clothes and to load the luggage back into the car!

We departed Dallas about 10:00 PM, drove for almost 12 hours, arriving just before 10:00 AM Sunday! As I unloaded Suzanne at her apartment, she implored me to come to church to hear her sing! In retrospect, I know that is exactly what I should have done. However, I caved into my feelings of fatigue, confessing that I had to get home before I passed out for the lack of sleep! WOW! What a chicken I was! It did not please Suzanne, and was an unfortunate end of our first date, as I really blew it! Our first date had been 39 hours, 1,100+ miles in two states, and most of it unintended!

Needless to say, our friendship blossomed into romance and the marriage was on September 30, 1962 at the Canal Street Presbyterian Church in New Orleans.

The story from the first date until marriage and early years is another story. I hope you enjoyed reading this first meeting story, and the very interesting turns in life, at least for me.

There was no expectation in my life at that time where marriage was planned to appear in the foreseeable future. It had been my assumption all along that some day there would be marriage and children! However, in this story, marriage did appear very soon! It was the best thing that every happened to me in human experiences! Suzanne is the bonding element in our family, and it is my exceedingly great blessing to have been given to her! She is my lover, my best friend, my Christian colleague and partner. She is the very effective mother for our children, and she is the most beautiful woman among our generation of friends! She has first priority in my life for me to serve and protect her in all respects. Thanks be to God for his marvelous provisions!



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