

Christina Gale Sells

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LaDessa Lindsay Sells

A Condensed Life story

LaDessa was born in 1918 to LaDessa Munsell Burroughs who was nearly 45 at the time of her birth, and Arthur Burroughs in NYC. Her father was ill for much of her childhood and died when she was 12. Due to lack of a steady income, her mother moved them around the country trying to make a living and staying with various relatives including those in Hollywood California (the place where she probably got a passion for movie stars that led her to some connections and a meeting with a couple of major ones of the time), Santa Barbara, Centralia, Washington , Ellensburg Washington, where she spent some of her favorite years on a horse ranch of her uncles and developed a passion for horses and animals, and Portland. She struggled throughout her school life however, because having bounced all over the country she could never be in one lot place long enough to make friends, settle down, or finish any schools curriculum.



During her later teenage years they landed in the old family home in Ocean Park Washington on the Long Beach Peninsula, where her grandfather had been a doctor and surgeon, in a charming cottage style house on the main street built in 1885 and designed by her uncle William O. Munsell a Pasadena architect trained in the Arts and crafts Movement style of architecture and who also designed some of Portland's great houses.

In Ocean Park she and her mom rented out rooms and cottages and made a little business of making curios from found beach shells, driftwood and such, most of them beautifully hand painted scenes or made into funny characters to sell to tourists. A 1937 photo of LaDessa depicts her with a crab shell back painted to look like Alfred E. Neuman predating most depictions of that character.



During this time LaDessa got a job as a hand colorist of black-and-white photos that the town photography studio, Charles Fitzpatrick Photography Studio in Ocean Park, Wa. took of his clients and whose specialty was selling photographs of the shipwrecks on that stretch of coast where many dozens of ships had wrecked mistaking the entrance of Willapa Bay for the entrance to the Columbia River.

Always an A student and artistically exceptional, she worked her way out of extreme shyness and became class valedictorian of Ilwaco high school in her senior year. She completely



covered her bedroom walls with pasted up photos of movie stars, and met at least Edward Everett Horton who apparently stayed in on of their cottages and she remembered him saluting and clicking his heels to her.

She had a huge crush on Nelson Eddy and sculpted his head with amazing accuracy and sent him a photo of it. He wrote back: if he ever lost his head, he would use the one she had made of him instead.

During those years of living in Ocean Park, and renting out rooms and cottages, a tall dark and handsome curly haired 1/8 Ojibwa Radio engineer man named Gale Sells (see story about



him in Oregonian obituaries 2004) stopped by to rent out a cottage, and it was love at first sight. A courtship began.

He was her first and only true love and after their marriage in 1939, when she was 21, he moved his bride to his mom Edith's little farm that had a cow and chickens and fruit and vegetable gardens on 78th and NE Prescott in Portland, where they divided the land, the young



couple purchasing the original tiny house where his mom and stepdad Wilmot Vandervoort had



lived before they built a new house that same year that included a small building next to the house that was Van's barbershop which served the neighborhood for decades.

In those early years Gale and LaDessa bit by bit remodeled the house, but not before they spent many happy days traveling the Western great national parks in their ancient 1938 Oldsmobile on their vacations.

LaDessa worked at Gale's partnership business, Radio Specialty Manufacturing Company which was in what is now the Pearl district, at 122 N.W. 10th Ave., and later housed close in the Eastside Portland, 2023 SE 6th St. which during the war years manufactured crystal set radio communication devices for the war and other "radio" equipment for the forest service and quartz crystals for various other uses. Further history of the company may be found at: <http://www.wb6nvh.com/CCC/RSPEC.htm> Gale and LaDessa were friends, and Gale was a respected colleague of Howard Vollum who started up Tektronix, and if not for mismanagement of RSMF by a partner, they could have been at the forefront of the tech industry as well.

After the war they did what everyone else was doing and had a couple of kids, Bonita LaDessa first and then Christina Gale who was supposed to be the boy who would go into the radio business, and was already named Arthur after her grandfather.

Gale and LaDessa took up dancing and joined a round and square dance group: The ONO Dancers who had many different beautiful mostly hand made costumes some of which were used in novelty "black light" performances. Next, starting in the early 1950's they joined in a





performing folk dance group, the Peasant Folk Dancers, later renamed the Bavarian Folk Dancers who performed dances from around the world in Rose Festival events, in the Washington Park amphitheater, in the precursor to the Starlight Parade, the Merikana parade, and many cultural



festivals throughout the area. They dressed the children up in homemade international costumes like they were dressed in as well, and taught them to perform the dances too.

After the house was remodeled to include a big open basement with an outside entrance, the folk dance group met there for practice, dance parties and potlucks for at least 50 years continuously every Tuesday night.

The couple struggled financially, and there were no extravagances except electronics which Gale had a weakness for; no dinners out, clothes were hand me downs, fruit from the trees was put aside by canning. LaDessa didn't seem to care that they couldn't buy much as she was as nonmaterialistic as they come, aided by going through the depression, growing up poor and needing to be frugal and make do with whatever she had throughout her life. She never denied Gale his electronic gadgets.

She found a way of getting a County Library bookmobile to stop in front of the family home on a regular basis so the kids could have a steady supply of reading material.

LaDessa decided to become a Girl Scouts leader, and through that, she and Gale ended up volunteering to teach countless Girl Scouts and Brownies as well as thousands of Elementary



school kids in after-school programs to dance, including swing, square, basic ballroom dances, and of course folk dancing for many, many years. Wherever she went she would often run into people who would say they had been her students and that she and Gale had turned them on to dancing.

Whenever she could, LaDessa would paint, mostly beautiful scenic nature centered scenes or make hand painted ceramics which she would do with the family, friends including her mother-in-law next-door and her mother who lived with them into her mid 90s, and to whom she was always extremely devoted. Scores of wonderful paintings and craft-works emerged from her.



Every year for about 15 years until around 1965, she got the family involved in a YMCA Family Dance Camp at the Silver Falls WPA built camp in the old growth forest, where they'd all go and spend an extremely happy Labor Day Weekend dancing and singing.

In the 1970's and 80's she worked as a beloved team leader in Account Services of U.S. Bank. During her and Gale's retirement years (earlier they had bought a camper and put it on an old truck and later they bought a small used recreational vehicle) and whenever possible they'd

roam the national and State Parks of the west, where LaDessa continued to paint prolifically and both of them did photography. Gale involved LaDessa in the work of putting together huge elaborate slideshows of their travels where he would have her record narrations of the information on the history and geology of the area featured.

As she aged, she nurtured many people until they passed including her adored husband of 65 years Gale, who died in 2004 at 92. What was always most important to LaDessa was loving people or any living thing around her. She was always selfless and fiercely looked out for any underdog or friend in need of support that she could help. She had a poetic way of phrasing things, with a extremely creative vocabulary. She was also the one who in the crowd who hooted and hollered at a performance or a job well done. She was the glue of the family. Wherever she spent time though, including in her final times at the hospital, at the nursing home, and eventually at the memory care place, she left a trail of people in love with her and offering to do extra for her and wanting to keep in touch with her. She was kindness, love, humor, enthusiasm, intelligence, love of learning, music, art, the sciences and the natural world embodied. Despite a lot of memory loss, during her last months and days she would often tell caretakers and her children and friends who visited that she loved them, and would give bits of nurturing wisdom. Truly a magnificent human being who is sorely missed.



