

Yours Truly

Well-wisher's unique signature led to romance, years later.

By Richard "Skip" Kain, Apple Valley, California

WE WERE patients at the children's hospital in Akron, Ohio. She was 11 years old, and I was 12. It was 1946.

This girl, Ilene, was recovering from an appendectomy, which usually involved a week's stay back then. After a few days, she was helping the nurses serve snacks and hot chocolate to the patients. She was in the fourth grade and wanted to become a nurse.

I was in the burn ward after an accident involving my buddies and me and a bottle of flammable liquid in a vacant lot.

Due to my recent Boy Scout training with Troop 73, I survived. As a newspaper article about me noted, "Richard leaped to his feet and ran to a nearby mud puddle. He rolled in this and the flames eating at his clothing died out."

I stayed in the burn ward, recovering from second- and third-degree burns, long after Ilene had been discharged.

After Ilene saw the photo and story about me in the newspaper, she told her mother that she had seen me at the hospital when the reporters were doing the story. She begged her mother to let her send a get-well card.

Due to the article and pictures, I received many cards and letters, and my mother saved every one.

A few years later, I dug out the many pieces of correspondence, and as I was reading through them, I came upon one that caught

my attention. It was signed "Ilene Merritts, The Redheaded girl."

Since I had been under quite a bit of sedation, I honestly didn't remember her. I looked in the phone book to find that there was just one Merritts listed.

Many phone conversations later, Ilene and I did meet, after I got my driver's license. I never dated another girl after that first date with the pretty redhead.

On October 20, we will celebrate our 54th wedding anniversary. By the way, my pretty redhead did become a pediatric nurse, retiring after 35 years.

And as for that get-well card, I still have it after all these years!