



Rising from the Ashes

Family heirloom resurrects tales of lost city

BY JOHNNIE BACHUSKY
Red Deer Express

In January, Lacombe's Angela Pala had a tattoo of the legendary Phoenix bird with the name Nash engraved on her back.

Nash is her four-year-old son, whose second name is Phoenix, which according to ancient Greek mythology rose from the ashes.

The young boy is part Czech and when Nash is pronounced in that language it means "ours."

For Angela, it all means "our Phoenix."

But there is more to the story to the name of Phoenix for Angela and her family.

"I was thinking that my interest in Phoenix has always been there but it wasn't until I had a child that I wanted to know more," said Angela, whose husband Jerry owns Pala Auto-Pro in Lacombe. "This is when the investigation got personal."

At about the time Nash Phoenix was born, Angela's father Roy Bush passed on a mysterious gift - a box of crystal originally from the Brooklyn Hotel, the classiest and most renowned hotel in the legendary City of Phoenix, British Columbia.

The box contained 13 pieces of crystal, including wine glasses, water goblets and custard dishes.

The Brooklyn Hotel was once owned by James and Effie Marshall, Angela's great-aunt and great-uncle.

The three-story hotel, first opened on Jan. 1, 1897 with a grand ball and supper, became one of the most important social places to be in Phoenix, a copper mining community on top of a 4,630 ft. high mountain that once hailed itself as the "highest" city in Canada.

"It was the best hotel there. It was the Cadillac of restaurants in that whole area," said Myrtle Wolf, a 90-year-old niece of the Marshalls who was born in Phoenix in 1915 and now lives in Port Hueneme, California.

"The Brooklyn Hotel was known all over for its wonderful meals."

The box of crystal ignited Angela's interest in the City of Phoenix, which first opened a post office in 1898.

At its peak Phoenix bustled with up to 4,000 copper crazy citizens, and had up to 20 hotels and saloons, gambling casinos, four churches, an impressive city hall, a covered skating rink, hospital, brewery, an electric power company, telephone exchanges and even an opera house.

In 1911, Phoenix's hockey team won the provincial championship. That same year, the team asked for the right to challenge for the Stanley Cup, professional hockey's

all-time prize for supremacy, but were told their request came a little too late to qualify.

But after the First World War, global copper prices plummeted and the mines at Phoenix closed - the "City in the Clouds" emptied, making it the highest ghost town in Canada.

Over the years, Angela learned her grandparents and Myrtle's parents - Orrin and Rossie Bush - were married in Phoenix in 1909.

Orrin was a bartender at the Brooklyn Hotel and that is where he first met Rossie, the sister of Effie Marshall.

The sisters' arrival to Phoenix in the early years of the 20th century was the result of personal family tragedy in their original home in Washington State.

Their father was murdered on his way to work during a dispute with a man over the ownership of a lamb.

The five children, except oldest sibling Effie, were ultimately sent to an orphanage.

Effie eventually made it to Phoenix where she met James and bought the Brooklyn Hotel.

When the four other siblings were old enough to leave the orphanage, Effie brought them to Phoenix and they all had jobs at the Brooklyn Hotel.

"She (Effie) gave them a start in life," said Myrtle. "She was a wonderful woman."

When Phoenix closed, Effie and Jim went to Vancouver and opened a boarding house on Hastings Street.

Loyal male boarders at the Brooklyn Hotel followed the couple.

"They had so many men at the Brooklyn they followed her to Vancouver and convinced her to buy a boarding house," said Myrtle.

The Brooklyn Hotel has long been demolished at Phoenix. In fact, nothing remains at the "City in the Clouds" except a First World War cenotaph and two cemeteries.

All remaining ruins of the town and mine sites were obliterated when open pit mining operations resumed in the late 1950s, and continued until 1978.

Myrtle has never returned to Phoenix since leaving at the age of three.

Angela has acquired many books and articles about the ghost town in her quest to learn more about her roots.

Some day, she would like to visit the site of the former "highest city in Canada."

"I would like to go to Phoenix. We've talked about it for years but have not quite made the leap," said Angela.

"Maybe we will take family photographs to see if anyone in that area is interested."

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Above: Angela Pala and her four-year-old son Nash Phoenix. Her son is holding a wine glass that was originally from Phoenix's Brooklyn Hotel.

Carla Victor/Red Deer Express

Top - left: Phoenix in 1918, a booming copper mining city.

Photo courtesy of the Greenwood Museum.

Top - middle: The site of Phoenix today, the ruins of the city obliterated by open pit mining in the 1960s and 1970s.

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Top - right: The Brooklyn Hotel (left) in downtown Phoenix in 1909.

Photo courtesy of the Greenwood Museum.