Gossip greats graced desert scene

Rivals Parsons, Hopper stayed civil in Palm Springs

The caption read, “Lovely Grace Kelly, who may soon become a Princess, receives an invitation from Jimmy McHugh to attend the Golden Nugget Ball at the Tennis Club on Saturday night, and the Marusia fashion show luncheon. Both are benefits for the Women’s Auxiliary of the Palm Springs Desert Hospital. Marusia has designed 10 gowns for Miss Kelly, which will be shown for the first time at the luncheon.”

The picture above the caption was snapped in January 1956 and showed a smiling and dapper McHugh, bespectacled, and Miss Kelly, wearing short white gloves, matching cuffs and collar, with a smart ribbon tied at the neck, and a big smile.

But it wasn’t usually Kelly, or any other starlet that McHugh was escorting in public. In the story accom-

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By 1951, Louella was the queen of Hollywood gossip.

It was just the sort of tidbit that would have appeared in one of Louella's columns. In polite circles, she was known to write a Hollywood movie column. But everyone knew it was all gossip.

On the West Coast though, gossip was the purview of Parsons. Having maneuvered herself into a contract with publisher William Randolph Hearst by writing of Parsons. Having maneuvered herself into a contract with publisher William Randolph Hearst by writing of compromising behavior about important people, her columns were paved with pan and delivered in blistering staccato when read on the radio.

On the East Coast, tabloid gossip and embarrassing news stories were synonymous with Walter Winchell, she was no less feared, as a wrong word from her could positively wreck a movie career.

Louella and Jimmy McHugh were definitely keeping company. They were together, especially in Palm Springs.

In 1956 wedding of Page at the El Mirador.

All that success lead McHugh to form a charity, at first to fight polio and then for other causes. In that capacity, Jimmy McHugh Charities produced benefit events to benefit good causes, including the Gold-Nugget Ball in Palm Springs, where he and Louella naturally hosted a table for St. Louisella was the undisputed queen of the ball in Palm Springs.

But in Los Angeles, Louella had a rival: Hedda Hopper. Hopper had 50 movies to her credit, and when her acting career dimmed, she re-created herself as a gossip columnist. She became syndicated nationally and between she and Louella, they had an estimated 75 million readers, some half of the country, hanging on their every nasty word.

Hopper could spout very well, often detailing the columns. In competition with Parsons. Hopper said her column was a contact to gather material, sometimes paying for information and sometimes with blackmail, specifically withholding from print stories in recompense for juicy dish. Hopper hit the national stage by divulging that President Franklin Roosevelt's son was divorcing his wife after being caught in an affair with a nurse at the Mayo Clinic. Her legacy is that of promoting the black-cat and aligning herself with Joseph McCarthy.

All movie stars had a "moral turpitude" clause in their contracts and the studio bosses used the threat of a well-placed tip to Louella or Hopper to ensure propriety behavior. Hopper was aware of the fear she engendered and even christened her Beverly Hills home the "House That Fear Built."

The rivalry between the two was epic. Amy Fine Collins, in a Vanity Fair article in 1997, wrote, "In its quest for columns, a commodity worth its price in gold, studio heads, publicists, and stars had long been playing the dangerous game of putting one woman against the other."

A staged reconciliation between the two at Roma- noff's was the stuff of legend. Peace didn't last, "Louel- la surmised, 'so many people say we do not' like one another. Who are we to argue against such an enthusiastic majority opinion?'"

Being late to the desert party, Hopper wrote for her columns entitled "Phoenix Expatriats (sic) Just Adore Palm Springs," in March of 1964, "So many of my friends have left their palatial Bel Air (sic) and Beverly to take up residence in Palm Springs. I had to see what magic had lured them away. I hadn't been there in years, so my eyes were open."

Surely Hopper found Parsons out on the brown with Jimmy McHugh, but thought better of mentioning it in print.