

Interview with Inie Simmons
submitted by Patsy Miller in the fall of 2012



Inie Simmons and Grandson, Stephen Ribustello (2012)

In the years of World War II, the majority of American women stayed home while their husbands, brothers and fathers, or sweethearts followed the now-famous posters of Uncle Sam pointing a finger and saying "I want YOU." But that was not what one pretty 24-year old girl from Salt Lake City decided to do. Inez Brown, known to us now as Inie Simmons, joined the American Red Cross and soon found herself in Casablanca, Morocco, having come by the ship, "Mariposa" along with 80 other Red Cross ladies, where they were assigned to aid and entertain 7,000 soldiers. Inie remembers the infamous "Rick's Place," which played a prominent role in the Bogart/Bergman movie, "Casablanca." The year was 1943, and soon she was transferred to the air base in Naples, Italy, and there she met Gene Simmons, an Army Air Corps Pilot from Tarboro, NC. Now you will learn "The rest of the story." Inie and 3 roommates were housed in a baby hospital, while the troops lived in a casino. She and the others put on shows for the GIs, and one year she ran the GI Club. With no previous experience on the stage, she soon learned how to dress up in costumes, dance, sing and write the scripts for the nightly shows that kept up the spirits of lonely servicemen so far from home. Pretty good for a quiet, Mormon girl with strong, Christian ethics! She recalls the war damage in Naples and General Patton's campaign in Northern Africa.

Once the war ended, Inie returned to the USA and in 1945, she and James Walter Eugene Simmons were married in the Episcopal Cathedral in Evanston, Illinois. (I asked Inie about the Mormon practice of one man having more than one wife, and she said that practice was terminated many years ago, but her great-grandfather had 13 wives and lived to be 100. Any comments?) The Simmons moved to Tarboro where Inie attended Calvary with Gene. Rev. Clary was the rector at that time, and he asked his wife to run the Sunday School; Inie was her assistant. She said to me, "Jim Jr. used to say that I was the hardest working non-Episcopalian he knew." (Inie became an Episcopalian later). When Rev. Clary left Calvary, Rev. Jack Spong came and changed the guard! As for her memories of rectors, she cited The Rev. Spong as the most controversial. He initiated the Holy Hoopsters for boys and girls and asked the ladies to pass the alms basins; Inie's last comment: "He (Spong) was ahead of his time."

As an admirer of Inie in my years at Calvary, I felt a renewal of my faith while listening to this warm, genteel lady, as she must be a fine role model to her children and grandchildren, and certainly to this interviewer.