
My Boyfriend Charlie:

Testimony of Margaret Bengsch Curtis,

Collected by Oakley C. Johnson for a

Biography of C.E. Ruthenberg,

circa 1940

Newly edited version of a typewritten document in C.E. Ruthenberg Papers,
box 1, folder 3, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH.

CER's first sweetheart. Brunette; black, sharp eyes. Must have been good looking. Slightly grey. Fairly slim, tall (5'3"). She married twice. Highly conventional, with snobbish traits and expression.

Charlie Ruthenberg was a neighbor of ours. I used to go out with him occasionally, but there was nothing serious. I sort of chummed with his sister Anna, who became a dressmaker.¹ Then we sort of drifted apart.

I didn't know Charlie's father. He had died before I knew the family, but I knew his mother. She was a mighty sweet woman. She was about 60, a sweet woman, kind of old-fashioned. She was grey haired, couldn't say about her eyes. Anna was a blonde, with grey eyes, and so was Charlie, blonde with blue eyes. Louise was blonde and grey-eyed, too. The whole family had blue-grey eyes. Louise died first, of typhoid fever, and left three little children. Anna died of T.B. She was a very pretty woman.

We moved in the neighborhood. My dad had a shoe store. My father and Willie and Brand and sometimes Charlie, they'd talk and play cards. Dad always said Charlie was a very intelligent boy.

Charlie was a great hand to read. I never paid attention to what he read, but I mostly saw him with a big, heavy book. I bet he read every book in the library. I will say Charlie was very intelligent, very

¹ Anna Louisa Wilhelmina Ruthenberg (1887-1917).

refined. He was a good boy. We weren't even of age. Of course, I never approved of what he did afterwards, and neither did his wife.

Charlie always wore a hat, never a cap — either a felt hat or a straw hat in the summer. He wore white shirts, with collar and cuff links. He didn't wear flashy ties. I've seen the time when he even wore black ties.

As far as he personally was concerned, he was a mighty fine young man. We used to go to the park and sit, take out lunches, picnic baskets. To me Charlie was the bashful kind — almost too bashful to kiss a girl.

Harry Wilson and a girl, Theodore Kretchmar and Anna, and C.E. and I used to pal around together, generally on Sunday afternoons in Edgewater Park, mostly, or Avon Beach. Then we'd have our little parties at home, too, at his place or at mine.

I remember once, about 1901, we went on a picnic party. It rained and the sun shone intermittently. The boys put up salt barrels when it rained. We went and came in the interurban cars. I had a good voice as a young girl and when we were ready to go home we stood under a tree and Theodore said, "Go on, Margaret, sing 'When the Swallows Homeward Fly,'" and I did. Everybody liked it.

We had a dramatic society. Theodore wanted to run the whole thing, he was the president. I think Charlie had an office, too. The idea was to put on plays. I don't remember the names of any of the plays. Charlie and Rose and Theodore and myself and Harry Wilson and Oswald Arnold and their girlfriends were all in it. Another girl, Alma Unkrich, was in it, too. I don't think we actually got to the point of producing a play, but I don't remember for sure.

Charlie's mother wore ordinary little house dresses, mostly black with a little white flower on it, buttoned down the front and shirred or tucked around the waist. She had a real sweet face. Ann made nice dresses for Mrs. Ruthenberg, she was a dressmaker. She just went to church and stayed home. She was a very home woman. She didn't talk English very well, she generally spoke German. Charlie talked English to her, never German, but he understood what she said. My mother used to go and visit Mrs. Ruthenberg. She was very nice to me. The Ruthenbergs spoke a different kind of German from what my family did, what they called Low German.

Once Charlie took my picture, which I'd given him, and had it enlarged by a photographer. Then he went around from house to house showing that picture and trying to get orders from people!

When I found out I don't know what I could have done to him — I was mad! He gave me the enlarged picture afterwards. He wasn't working yet then and was looking for a job or something to do.

At a party once, when I was 18 years old, Rose was there and she said, "You like Charlie, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, quite well. Do you?"

"Yes, I think he's a nice boy."

"Well, I'll introduce you, and I'll see that he takes you home to-night."

That's how they met.

The party at which I introduced Rose and Charlie was one given to me on my 18th birthday. I think Charlie made a big mistake when he left Rose to support Daniel herself.

After he was married, he told Rose that he always liked me — that he guessed he'd never care for anyone as much as he did for me. But I wasn't interested. Too bad when it's all on one side.

He was my first boyfriend.

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · May 2012 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.