

November 2013

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**Here's wishing  
everyone the best  
during this holiday  
season!**

### WHAT'S HAPPENED -

**November 21** - I gave a sparsely attended lecture at the **Winter Park Library Community Room** about how and why *The Bishop's Curse* came to be. Near the end of my time, I had occasion to read a short passage from the book. A nice lady in the audience then rather seriously asked, "How did you ever learn to write like that?" I was flattered, of course, and said I felt it was partly genetic because of the number of writers on my mother's side of the family. I was then asked why I write. I said, "It's because of comments like the one you just gave." And, that is the truth.

### The Word of the Month

**temper** - Another word in the English language that is used with contradictory meanings. "In a fit of **temper**, he responded so harshly that he vowed to **temper** his remarks in the future. here's what the dictionary says:

**temper** noun (tem per)

1. a particular state of mind or feelings.

2. habit of mind, especially with respect to irritability or patience, outbursts of anger, or the like; disposition: an even temper.
3. heat of mind or passion, shown in outbursts of anger, resentment, etc.
4. calm disposition or state of mind: to be out of temper.

## **Born in Carthage**

### **Starred in Hollywood**

Special to *The Carthage Tribune*

by Raff Ellis

As an unabashed movie buff, the Turner Classic Movies channel is a favorite stop on my TV dial. Recently, they aired a 1950 movie, *Hunt the Man Down*, starring Gig Young. The storyline was a rather trite plot about a wrongly accused man who had been on the run for a dozen years, and who had been re-apprehended, and was now being retried.

I have a habit of reviewing the bios of the actors in these old movies, to see where they were born and if they are still living. In *Hunt the Man Down*, an actress by the name of Carla Balenda had a supporting role. When I scanned her information, I was surprised to find that Ms. Balenda had been born in none other than Carthage, New York!

The only other Hollywood personality I knew to be born in Carthage was the famous horror film director, John Carpenter. Curiosity got the better of me so I undertook a search to find out more about Carla Balenda, no doubt a stage name. She was born in 1925 and was still alive, as far as the TCM channel knew. The first order of business was to find out her real name, and secondly, where she might now be residing.

The Internet is a great tool but it's hardly infallible. A preliminary search led to the information that Ms. Balenda also acted under the name of Sally Bliss. I appealed to some of my genealogy research associates and a couple responded that Carla's real name was indeed Sally Bliss. I was suspicious that this could also be just another stage name. I then sent a note to my daughter, Angele, who did her own search and also reported that Bliss was Carla's birth name. She added that Sally was residing in a town in California, information she gleaned from one of the many sites that track celebrities. Would Sally be living under her stage name? Birth name? Married name? More searching was in order.

A few false leads, one of which included a Bliss family that lived in Madison County, NY at the same time, and who had a daughter of the same age, also named Sally. I began thinking that Carthage might not be the actual birthplace because Cazenovia is only nine miles from where the Bliss family farm was located. Could this originally have been a transcription error that was, as often happens, perpetuated down through the decades?

Space does not permit a recitation of the details of my arduous search, but eventually I found a

Sally B. Rutter in Encino, California Could this be our Sally? I dialed the number and a lady with a firm clear voice answered. "Were you born in Carthage, New York"? I asked. "Yes I was," the woman quickly answered. I was surprised, not only because I got my party on the first try, but also because the voice was not what I expected for a woman who will turn 88 later this month. When I told her the purpose of my call and that I had just seen one of her movies, she quickly asked which one. "The one with Gig Young," I answered. "Oh, yes, *Hunt the Man Down*," she quickly recalled. "I played a schizophrenic lady who was a witness in the origin

al trial and had later suffered a mental breakdown." Her mind was clear and sharp--remembering details from over sixty years ago.

Film and TV credentials are easy to research on the Internet and Ms. Balenda/Bliss's credits are many. I'm sure some of you must remember her on the *Lassie* TV show where she appeared in sixteen episodes as Miss Hazlitt, Timmy's teacher. She also appeared on the *Mickey Rooney Show* (18 episodes) and *Dr. Fu Manchu* (13 episodes). I asked what her favorite movie role was and she replied, *Sealed Cargo*, with Dana Andrews and Claude Rains. "It was a big budget film," she said wistfully. Also mentioned as a favorite was her appearances in the TV series *The Gray Ghost*, based on an H. G. Wells story.



Sally Bliss was born in Carthage on November 22, 1925 at the home of her parents, Howard and Evylen Bliss. Her father, a graduate of Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie Mellon University), had moved the family from Ohio to take a position as science teacher at Carthage High School. Sally and an older sister were born in Carthage but remained there only until 1927 when the family moved to Amityville, Long Island (the site of the famous "Horror" some 47 years later).

Responding to my query of how she happened to become a thespian, Sally recounted that the family had relocated to Baldwin, Long Island where she appeared in a high school play at age fourteen. The reviews were so good that she was counseled to take up drama as a serious endeavor. That led to acting school in Rhode Island and appearances in other plays. Her talent soon became known in theater circles and she received numerous offers for representation by actors' agencies. At age seventeen, she was invited to Hollywood and signed with the Howard Hughes studio. She didn't actually meet Howard until a year later, which began a ten-year friendship. Although numerous Hughes web sites list their relationship as romantic (as they do for every other woman mentioned), Sally demurred when I asked if this was true. "Howard was always surrounded by beautiful women," she said. "Among those I met was Ava Gardner, "who was also linked amorously to Hughes. "I wouldn't say 'romantic'," she added. "We dated a few times."

In 1957, Carla Balenda changed her stage name back to Sally Bliss--the name with which she had begun her career." Everyone thought it was better sounding than Carla Balenda. That name was Howard's idea. He had a long list of exotic names that he chose from for his actresses," she said with a hint of humor.

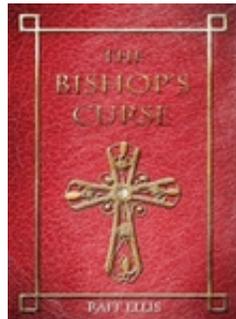
In her private life, Sally was married, when not quite nineteen, to a WWII Air Force pilot, John Martin, a union that lasted fifteen years and produced two boys. Six years after her divorce she met and married the prominent California attorney and author, William Rutter. The *Rutter Practice Guide* is still used in most law offices in the state. Mr. Rutter passed away in 2012.

Sally left acting in 1965 at her new husband's behest. He wanted her to be at home for her two children and to augment a burgeoning social life. In addition to her domestic duties, the new Mrs. Rutter found time to volunteer for charitable works, which she is still involved in today. Sally mentioned she is the proud grandmother of thirteen and a great-grandmother of six, all wonderful children.



Sally last visited Carthage when she was thirteen years-old. The family was on a road trip to Canada and her father wanted her to see the house where she was born. That was seventy-five years ago and she vividly remembers what it looked like but can't recall the street.

So, we wish a happy 88th birthday to Sally Bliss, with the hope she has many, many more!



A Short Excerpt from Chapter 1

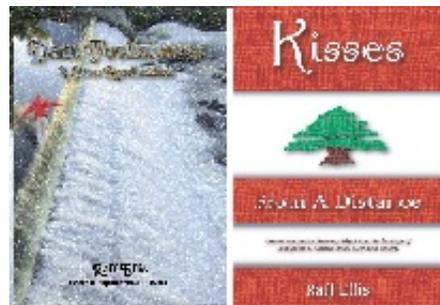
**Carthage, New York, January 1861**

“That bastard priest!”

Richard Gallagher bolted upright from his ample oak desk in the back of his spacious store. His large hands clenched the offending letter a messenger had delivered to his furniture emporium some ten minutes before. The elaborate penmanship with elongated curls and serifs, along with the red sealing wax

## Other Works By

**Raff Ellis**



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securing the envelope's flap, announced its importance. Gallagher ran his fingers over the raised impress, embossed with the signet of the Most Reverend Dr. John McCloskey, Bishop of Albany. When he finally slid his silver dagger-shaped letter opener under the seal, freeing it from its mooring, he exposed the words that evoked his curse. He plopped back down into his stuffed chair and scanned the words anew.

... the Holy Roman Catholic Church's decision that you hereby be excommunicated from its membership rolls and henceforth denied the sacraments of salvation..

The sharp words jumped off the page to penetrate his soul. The lanky man abruptly stood up again, violently shaking his head, disheveling his thick, prematurely gray-streaked hair. With tightened jaw, he began pacing the rear of his store before sinking back into his chair for a third time. With great effort, he resisted the impulse to crumple the letter into a heap and throw it into his wastebasket.

"That bastard priest!" he muttered once again.

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### Lecturer Availablility

Raff Ellis is available for lectures to various groups be they Church Societies, Irish-American

Clubs, Historical & Genealogical Societies, libraries, schools and universities. Presentations are tailored to the interests of the particular group and include topics such as how and why his books were written, the research involved, the problems encountered and how they were resolved.

Raff has lectured across the country and abroad, and his talks have been given an enthusiastic reception at every venue. To inquire about scheduling a lecture, send an email using the below link:

[raff.ellis@yahoo.com](mailto:raff.ellis@yahoo.com)

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