Badgett Quadruplets

There’s always been a huge amount of public interest in the birth of quadruplets. But the birth of the Badgett Quadruplets in the winter of 1939 drew national attention to the family and to Galveston Island. Author Bill Cherry tells us their story.

“On the very first Wednesday morning of February in 1939, Galvestonian, Ellis Badgett caught the elevator at his old St. Mary’s Infirmary. And when he got to his wife’s room, he saw a newspaper photographer, Herbert Winters, on the top of a step ladder with his Speed Graphic camera, just like the one I have here, and he was taking pictures through the transom’s window. That’s when Mr. Badgett learned that his wife had just beat big odds. She had given birth to quadruplets. They named theirs Joan, Joyce, Jeraldine and Jeanette, and within moments they were nationwide celebrities.

“Sensing the publicity that the Badgett Quads would bring the island, the city gave them a brand new, two-story home on Broadway. Their mother had a postcard printed of them, put them in all the souvenir stores on the island, and they sold like hot cakes. And the largest publisher of children’s material in the world, Saalfield, bought the license to sell Badgett Quad paper dolls. You can find them today in Kent State University’s archives. Baylor University gave them scholarships. And one of the milk companies hired them to be in their magazine and newspaper ads. The Girl Scouts made them honorary members. And when they were six, Governor Coke Stevenson made them members of the famous Rangerettes. And I forgot to tell you that when entertainers Phil Harris and Alice Faye were married in Sam Maceo’s hotel apartment, guess who the flower girls were. You’re right.

“Joan, Joyce, Jeraldine and Jeanette graduated from Ball High School in the late ‘50s, but fortunately by then their celebrity had waned, so they were able to have normal lives. They married. Two stayed in Galveston, and two moved to Dallas. Joan, who had been a public school librarian for many years, died a few days after her 63rd birthday. I’m Galvestonian Bill Cherry and I went to school with Joan, Joyce, Jeraldine and Jeanette Badgett, and I wish you could have seen them then. Boy, they sure were cute.”