

Ruth Edith Rome, daughter of Louis (1931-2014) and Winifred Helene (Ledger) Rome, was born 19 November 1962 in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, Michigan. She graduated from Okemos High School in 1980 and from Northwestern University in 1984. Ruth died in a fire aboard the ferry, *Scandinavian Star*, 7 April 1990 in the North Sea, Oslo, Norway. She was interred Hebrew Memorial Park Cemetery, Detroit,

Ruth Rome (Okemos High School Class of 1980)



At OHS: Ruth Rome took dance, drama, and singing classes at Okemos High School and sang in the Someko Singers choral group. She also studied piano, was in the Shaarey Zedek Congregation youth group, and the song leader at youth services.

After OHS: A 1984 Northwestern University graduate in theater, Ruth Rome moved to Manhattan with dreams of starring in a Broadway musical. As of March 1990, she had been living in Manhattan for four years. Near the end of that period, MCL Productions hired her to sing Broadway reviews and solo numbers in Hawaii on American Hawaiian Cruise Lines. After returning to New York, MCL asked if she was willing to go to Norway with a group for a one-month singing job on the *Scandinavian Star* ferry. She arrived in Oslo, Norway one week before the vessel went to sea. Ruth hoped the job would be the break into show business she had been waiting for and spring her into stardom. "She hadn't had her big break," Ruth's mother (Winifred) said. "She was always hoping. She was the eternal optimist." "She had a beautiful voice. Over the years her confidence increased, as did her sage presence and her voice," Winifred said (*Lansing State Journal*, Lansing, Michigan – April 9, 1990).

Tragically, on Saturday, April 7, 1990, Rome (27 years old) was among 161 people who died in a fire aboard the *Scandinavian Star*. Only 345 passengers escaped. Ruth's body was flown home on Thursday, April 19 and interred in the Hebrew Memorial Park Cemetery in Detroit, Michigan.

Kerry Byrnes '63

Lansing State Journal (Lansing, Michigan) 9 April 1990

OKEMOS NATIVE BELIEVED DEAD IN FERRY BLAZE

Ruth Rome called her mother, Winifred Rome, from New York's Kennedy Airport minutes before her plane was to leave for Norway on March 30.

It was a quick conversation. Ruth asked her mom to pay a bill for her, then they said their goodbyes.

Winifred believes it was their last conversation.

Ruth Rome, 27, is assumed to be among the 150 people killed in a fierce fire early Saturday on the Scandinavian Star ferry, which continued burning for a second day Sunday.

Rome, who had been living in Manhattan for four years, had taken a singing job on the ferry hoping it would be the break into show business she had been waiting for, Winifred Rome said from her East Lansing home Sunday night.

"She hadn't had her big break," she said. "She was always hoping. She was the eternal optimist."

Ruth Rome, a 1980 graduate of Okemos High School, arrived in Norway one week ago for a one-month singing stint on the Scandinavian Star, her mother said. Word of her possible death comes five days after another Okemos High School graduate was stabbed to death in San Diego.

Holly Tarr, 18, was found dead in her brother's apartment last Tuesday. Tarr was very involved in local entertainment circles. Her killer has not been found.

Rome attended Okemos schools through high school. She sang in the high school's Someko choral group. While in East Lansing, she studied dance and piano. She was in a youth group at the Shaarey Zedek Congregation, and was the song leader at youth services.

A 1984 Northwestern University graduate in theater, she moved to Manhattan with dreams of starring in a Broadway musical, her mother said.

"She had a beautiful voice. Over the years her confidence increased, as did her sage presence and her voice," Winifred Rome said.

Ruth Rome had worked for the past six months for MCL Productions. The company sent her to sing Broadway reviews and solo numbers on American Hawaiian Cruise Lines.

Detroit Free Press, April 9, 1990

Police seek arson clues in ship fire; 60 missing

New York Times and Reuters

OSLO, Norway — Opening an arson investigation into the ferry fire on Saturday that killed as many as 135 people, Norwegian police said Sunday they were checking for links between the predawn blaze and earlier North Sea ferry fires, at least one of which was deliberately set.

Meanwhile, rescue workers dodged roaring flames to remove the first of the bodies aboard the Scandinavian Star ferry. In Lysekil, Sweden, where the still-burning car ferry has been towed and docked, rescue officials said 75 bodies had been counted.

Rescuers dynamited a hole on the ship's side to get in and began removing bodies in large metal containers by crane. Hundreds of spectators watched along the narrow harbor.

Officials estimated 60 people were missing and feared dead and 345 were

See **FERRY**, Page 7A

"She had a wonderful time and after she got back to New York, she was contacted by them a couple of weeks ago," Winifred Rome said. "They asked if she was willing to go to Norway with a group."

She accepted, but not before calling her mother for advice.

"She asked what I thought," Winifred Rome said. "I told her ultimately it was her decision. She had had mono recently and I said: 'Do you really think you should do this?' I told her to check with the doctors.

The doctors told Ruth Rome that there was no reason why she shouldn't take the job.

"She said: 'It gives me a chance to perform and that's what it's all "about,"' her mother said.



Ruth Rome

Norwegian police probe fire on ferry

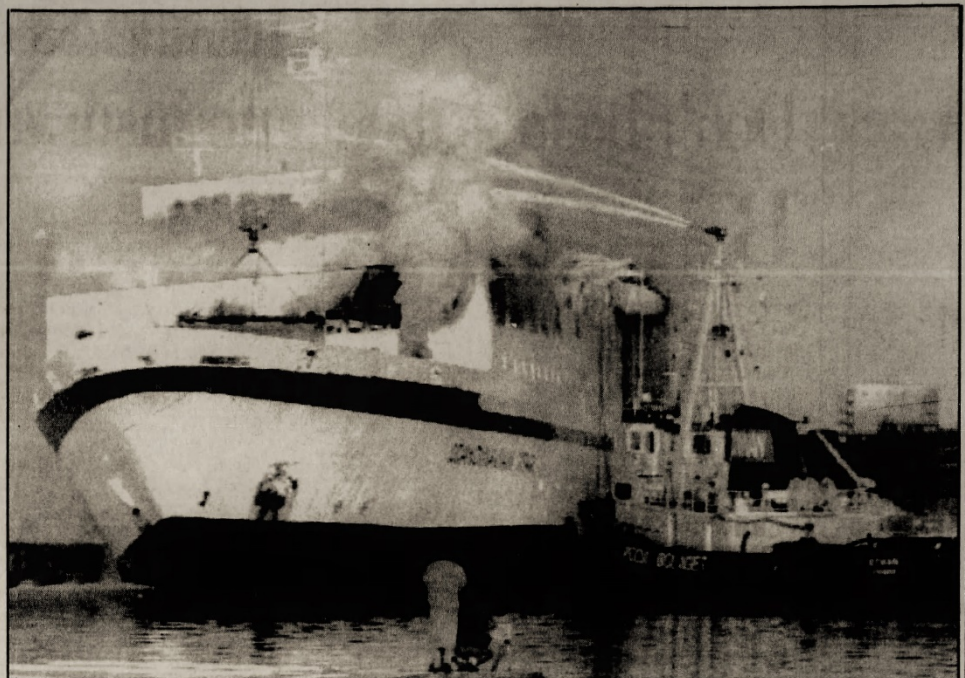
FERRY, from Page 1A

saved from the fire which engulfed the 10,513-ton ferry early Saturday on its way from Oslo to Denmark.

A former Michigan resident was among those missing and presumed dead. Ruth Rome, 27, was aboard the ship as part of a seven-member song-and-dance troupe from New York that entertained passengers.

She was following a lifelong dream that took her from drama, dance and singing classes at Okemos High School to Northwestern University in Illinois, New York and Hawaii.

Winifred Rome said Sunday she



GREG BOS/Associated Press

In Lysekil, Sweden, thick smoke continues to billow Sunday from the Scandinavian Star ferry, which has been towed and docked there. As many as 135 people were believed killed in Saturday's blaze.

learned her daughter probably did not survive. "I wish I could say something else . . . with all my heart," said Rome, from her East Lansing home.

Another member of the troupe said Ruth Rome had gone to her cabin before the others, who were watching videos closer to the lifeboats.

In Oslo, the assistant chief of police, Magnar Aukrust, said authorities began examining arson as a possible cause after the captain, members of the crew and some passengers said they believed the fire was set deliberately. Aukrust said police had uncovered no motive.

"We are basing our work on the concrete theory that it was arson," Aukrust said. "We are interviewing crew and survivors about what they

saw and checking names on the passenger list against records of known arsonists."

Maritime and police officials in Sweden and Denmark joined the investigation. Aukrust said the disaster may be linked to several recent fires on Danish North Sea ferries.

He said investigators were comparing passenger lists from the Scandinavian Star with those of other ships on which fires broke out.

"We might then narrow down the field of possible suspects," he said. "But we have no concrete leads or suspects yet. That is likely to take at least a few days more."

Aukrust said some survivors reported they saw piles of burning clothes or linen in the ship's corridors

before the blaze erupted.

Ship Capt. Hugo Larsen has been quoted as saying that three separate fires were started deliberately outside cabins and that the crew put out two but was unable to control the third.

The fire was the most deadly North Sea ship disaster since March 6, 1987, when a car ferry, the Herald of Free Enterprise, capsized off the Belgian port of Zeebrugge, killing 189 people.

Fire also broke out today on a car ferry carrying 297 people from Britain's west coast to Ireland, killing a crew member and injuring nine people, officials said.

Free Press Staff Writer Marian Dozier and AP contributed to this report.

The woman from the production company who hired Ruth Rome called Winifred on Saturday morning asking if Ruth had phone home.

"I said: 'No. Why?'" Winifred Rome said. "She said because the ship caught fire the night before." "I know that Ruth would call if she was OK. As the day progressed and the news progressed it got worse."

The charred ferry, its intense fire spewing poisonous smoke, was towed Sunday into a port in Lysekil, Sweden, about 250 miles southwest of Stockholm, a day after flames broke out while the ship was carrying about 500 tourists and crew members on an overnight trip from Norway to Denmark.

"I'm upset. I just feel like there's a lot of negligence there that has coast a lot of lives," Arkansas native Rick Qualls, who was in the seven-member entertainment troupe with Rome, said Sunday in a telephone interview from his Oslo, Norway, hotel room.

Qualls said he and all his companions except Rome were on deck when they smelled smoke. Rome had retired to her cabin.

"The alarm didn't sound until the ship was filled up with smoke and flames. Because of that the people who were sleeping are the ones who perished," Qualls said.

"The crew did everything they possibly could. The crew saved as many lives as they could," he said. "They were understaffed. Never once did we see a fire team, people with hoses. We picked up two fire extinguishers that didn't work."

Swedish officials said 345 people survived.

Winifred Rome, who is director of budget and personnel in the College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University, said she is trying to remain hopeful that her daughter escaped.

Asked if Ruth might have written a letter that is in transit, her mother said; "She may have sent a letter. But she wasn't good at writing.

"I used to tell her that letters were easier to save than phone calls."

Michigan entertainer feared for her safety

DETROIT -- Aspiring actress Ruth Rome wrote her mother a letter saying 'I made a mistake' just before the Scandinavian Star sailed from Norway to Denmark.

Rome, who took a job as an entertainer aboard the ferry a little over a week ago, is listed among the missing and feared dead in Saturday's fire in the North Sea.

'I think she found herself in a situation that she wished she hadn't been in,' her father, Louis Rome of Ann Arbor, said Monday.

Louis Rome told the Detroit News his daughter was appalled by the physical condition of the vessel and expressed fear and regret for taking the job.

Ruth's mother, Winifred Rome of East Lansing, received the postcard on Monday but would not talk about it.

But a friend of Ruth's and survivor of the fire said he and other members of the entertainment group wrote to their families about poor safety on the vessel.

'Conditions were terrible,' Rick Qualls said in a telephone interview with the News from Oslo. 'The ship was terrible. The ship was just not safe to be sailing on.'

Qualls, 31, a singer and dancer like Rome, said the seven-member entertainment troupe had been discussing quitting 'because it was such a bad situation' aboard the Scandinavian Star.

During the six 10-hour trips the ferry took between Oslo and Frederikshavn, Denmark, neither crew members nor passengers were drilled on lifeboat procedures, he said.

Rome, 27, took the job aboard the ill-fated ferry a little more than a week ago, shortly after completing six months of cruise work in the Hawaiian Islands.

She graduated with honors from Okemos High School in 1980 and completed a degree in theater arts at Northwestern University in 1984. Later, she moved to New York City to pursue her career.

Her father is an Ann Arbor attorney and former chief of the Michigan Crime Commission. Her mother is chief financial officer for Michigan State University's medical school.

In New York, Rome worked nights as a waitress and auditioned during the day. She was in the chorus of a Broadway revival of 'I Married an Angel,' toured the United States with a troupe performing 'Evita' and did a European tour in 'West Side Story.'

She was an extra on the short-lived television series 'Dream Street,' and appeared in the film 'Ghostbusters II.'

Lansing State Journal (Lansing, Michigan) Thursday 19 April 1990

FUNERAL SET FOR FERRY VICTIM

The body of a former East Lansing resident killed in a Scandinavian ferry fire will be flown home today, her mother said.

Ruth Rome, 27, a 1980 graduate of Okemos High School, was among 161 people who died April 7 aboard the Scandinavian Star.

Rome, who had been living in Manhattan, had taken a singing job on the ferry and arrived one week before the vessel went to sea. She had hoped the job would spring her into stardom.

Funeral services are set for 10:30 a.m. Sunday at Congregation Shaarey Zedek, 1924 Coolidge Road in East Lansing, said Winifred Rome, Ruth's mother.

Burial will be at Hebrew Memorial Park Cemetery in Detroit.

Winifred Rome said an endowed fund is being established at Okemos High School and at Shaarey Zedek in Ruth's name.

"I think it will be for music-related activity," Rome said. "A scholarship or something...We haven't worked out the details."

Police sway the fierce ferry fire was arson.

The captain and owner of the ferry may face criminal charges. An inquiry into the fire was adjourned until April 25.

The proceedings have exposed a catalog of safety omissions and blunders pointing to possible negligence that may have contributed to the death toll.