

The Life of Ruth Beattie: 1917 – 2010
as told by Susan K. Cardinal, Granddaughter
with inspiration from siblings

My grandmother was modest and would be embarrassed by all this attention. However, dying is a major event in her life and it is fitting to spend a few minutes remembering her.

If you saw a bright car coming down the driveway, chances are it was Grandma. She liked yellow and bright red. She also dressed boldly with floral patterns and large jewelry and bright lipstick. She had some roosters and parrot earrings.

The grandchildren remember that she had lots of enthusiasm for plants, animals and words.

Some years her yard was amazing with all the flowers in bloom everywhere. She was also very bold and brave when it came to the garden, moving plants around and driving a very large tractor. She knew the name of every plant. She had a large garden where she grew cherry tomatoes, swiss chard, cucumbers, rhubarb, blackberries, red raspberries and much more. She often picked something, rinsed it with the hose, and gave us a taste.

There were several evenings when we sat out on the porch during the summer and watched the swallows catch mosquitoes. She knew all the birds and boy did she get excited if there was a new one. She immediately dropped what she was doing and found the birding book. Even as she aged, she liked to have a bird feeder around. She named one Cardinal pair after Don and I. She also loved dogs and cats and really any animals. She once discovered a rabbits nest in the garden and she may have moved the rabbits but I'm sure they weren't harmed. She used a have-a-heart trap to capture varmints and relocate them to a more agreeable environment. She loved her dogs, Hansel, Duchess, Microphone and Lady.

Grandma could be protective. When they first moved to New Lenox, they had chickens. There were roaming dogs that poached these chickens. Grandma tried to put a stop to this with her bee bee gun. She said the dogs yelped but didn't think she killed any.

Words fascinated her. She did the crossword and the jumble daily. A new word would send her running to the dictionary in glee. I'll always remember her creative swear words. She'd tell us that 4 letter words were too boring to use. Create your own. Some of hers were very funny: Shickel groobers, Al Crumba and Sacramento. Imagine those said loudly said by a petite woman in pain!

She was always a teacher in and out of the classroom. Because she liked games, she taught us to play cards, dominos, scrabble, back gammon, ping

pong, tennis and much more. Playing with Grandma had built in rewards. Somewhere in the middle of a double deck pinochle game it was time for Fiddle Faddle and lemonade, or cookies and milk, or fruit cake and juice. Bruce's favorite was a rhubarb sauce. We frequently had ice cream sometimes home made. She'd always say it wasn't much but hoped we liked it.

She taught us all to play ping pong and then she would play against us. Her motto was just to return the ball. It was many years before we could win a game and even then it tended to be close. Once the ball bounced into Hansel's mouth and he was so stunned and didn't know what to do.

They had a pool in their back yard where we learned how to swim. During the summer we would swim almost every day. We could splash all we wanted until she got into the pool. She would turn on big band music from the 30s and swim laps. Her goal was a mile a day and she kept track with an abacus. We became skilled at swimming underwater and controlled our splashing so she wouldn't ask us to leave. We also frequently heard, "If you two want to fight, you'll have to go home!"

She had some sayings. One was "Don't say I never you gave you anything." There was the year that I told her that I was interested in the Jumble. She saved them all and sent me home with stacks after stacks. Another was "if at first you don't succeed try, try again!" She was very persistent and encouraged us to be. She was always telling me to "take my coat off and stay awhile." She was very free with her kitchen and taught me how to make scrambled eggs. She didn't mind if we got messy. "If you can read, you can cook."

She was a pretty good cook and had the family over for holidays. There was always wine with dinner which we got to taste.

Grandpa had lots of projects that were messy and took up great amount of space. Sometimes there were holes in the wall and in the floor. Although didn't she didn't like it, she accommodated it out of love.

Grandma liked a little change in the form of rearranging furniture. For a petite woman, large furniture was no obstacle. We heard a story that one day Grandma rearranged the bedroom while Grandpa was at work. He came home late and wanted to go straight to bed. He laid down where the bed used to be with a big clunk.

Grandma and Grandpa had several camping trailers and liked to take trips. Sometimes they would go to Kankakee which was 20 miles from New Lenox and stay for a few days. Sometimes they would go all the way to Texas to visit Irene. During the summer we would occasionally sleep in the trailer in their driveway.

When I got the urge to run away, I always went next door. Grandma would always notice when something was bothering you, ask about it and sit down and listen. She provided comfort very naturally, making chicken soup, or providing tissues or a glass of water at exactly the right time. If you were sick, she also provided a distraction like a puzzle.

I hope that hearing about this rich life was a comfort to you. She was really a special wife, mother, daughter, sister, grandmother and more and we will miss her, but these memories live on. She would shrug her shoulders and say Ceste La Vie – or that's life.