

Ruth Pearson Beattie by daughter Irene

Since Mom was nearly forty years old when I was born, much of this information was told to me. With that disclaimer, I will proceed.

My mother Ruth was the eldest, of the three daughters, of Frank Johnson Pearson and Ruth Johnson Pearson. Although born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, she spent a significant summer on her uncle's farm in Michigan, which enhanced her already budding love of plants, flowers and nature. She did well in school, and became a teacher because she passed the rather competitive entrance exam for Chicago Teacher's College, and because Chicago Teacher's college was free. Despite this random choice of career, it was good match. After finishing her elementary teaching certificate, there were no jobs available, so she got her certification in special education, where there were always openings.

Mom met Dad's younger brother Frank in a botany class. Frank then introduced Mom to Dad. Neither were keen on each other at first, but that changed rapidly. As Dad was Roman Catholic, they chose to be married by a Roman Catholic priest. At that time Mom wasn't allowed in the church itself, so they were married in the priests residence. Aunt Fran said she hadn't even gotten her coat off, and the deed was done. Mom and Dad enjoyed nearly 63 years of an interesting, but very happy marriage.

For both Mom and Dad children were extremely important. Their house was always child friendly, and messes were allowed. Cousins frequently spent time there. Mom and Dad enjoyed and were so proud of their first child, my sister, Cathy. She was cute, smart and lots of fun. After having Cathy though, Mom endured two miscarriages, and brother Frank was born six years later after a very dicey pregnancy. Although he was a beautiful baby and seemed physically normal, it was apparent almost immediately something was very wrong. He didn't respond or smile normally. He would cry all night, if not constantly rocked. He didn't learn to talk at all. He had odd movements and behaviors. Mom and Dad endured rounds of specialists, one who even suggested Frank was deaf. Finally, when Frank was about three, Mom and Dad were told by a doctor that while he didn't know what Frank had, in his experience, Frank would be like this the rest of his life, so they should put him in an institution and go on with their life. Frank's condition now has a name: severe classic autism. Mom, with her determination, taught Frank a few simple commands, by age five, potty trained him ... which she said was her greatest accomplishment in life ... and taught him to ride a tricycle. No one has gotten further. They moved to a small town with acreage in hopes Mom could interest Frank in animals. Mom ran the local school for the retarded, in hopes Frank might progress with peers. She endured the theories that autism was caused by cold mothers. Later, when she was pregnant with me, and Frank was eight, they had him legally committed, but he remained at home. Sometime after I was born, it became apparent to Mom that she couldn't keep me safe, with Frank in the house, so my parents had to take the very difficult step of institutionalizing Frank in a Lutheran home. I think life became easier for Mom after she adjusted to that. She went back to teaching elementary school when I was in kindergarten. Cathy and LeRoy built a house next door and Mom enjoyed participating in her grandchildren's growing up. When Mom and Dad retired they enjoyed traveling in their trailer so when I moved to central Texas, after college graduation, Mom and Dad would drive here to visit me often.

Mom didn't spend much money on herself. Unless there was a special event, she wore basic

clothes, redecorated only when things were worn out and most of the books she read were from the library. However she made sure there was always money for the doctor, dentist, nursing care for Frank and for college for her children.

Mom enjoyed life long Bible study. She didn't just drop me off at Sunday School, she would go to the adult class too and then we would attend church together. Dad was equally faithful at the local Roman Catholic church and they supported both.

Mom's passions included books, words, games, gardening, birdwatching and nature. She gardened with abandon. Her beds were not regular or systematically planned and seldom completely weed free, but they were glorious. She knew all the birds in the area well and yelled at the squirrels who stole the birdseed. When traveling she had a great time identifying plants and animals seen along the way. Dad always said it greatly enhanced his enjoyment of travel.

Mom stayed physically active, playing casual tennis and volleyball into her late 60's . She was the oldest volleyball player in the church group. She played a wicked game of ping-pong which she taught to me and all of her grandchildren.

In retirement Mom accidentally entered politics. Someone had resigned from the library board before their term ended, and Mom was asked to take that position. When Mom's partial term ended, Mom registered for the election. Another candidate came forward and actively campaigned against her. Her campaign consisted of a speech at the kick-off that said something like "If you elect me I will do my best to do a good job." Then she and Dad drove to Texas to visit us. My sister, Cathy, had to call Mom on election night to tell her that she had won! This is what happens when you teach in an area for 20 years and lots of folks remember you.

There are many things I remember about Mom including, her smile, her enthusiasm for life, learning and children, her wit, her love of shoes (especially red ones) and what a good mother and grandmother she was.