

Ruth Margaret Fell (1943 – 2019)

Ruth was born in Ton Pentre on the 21st of February 1943, the middle child of five born over a twenty-five-year period to Oliver and Margaret Jones. The age spread of the children meant that Ruth learnt how to be a good big sister from Joan and practiced those skills for the rest of her life on her baby brother Philip. Her other brothers Brian and Alan, both now sadly dead, made up what was a happy and loving family.

She had a happy childhood, though she didn't speak much about it to Jonathan. She spent a lot of time with her brothers and sister, Philip told me he remembers her enjoying riding on Brian's back. When Joan married she lived next door and Ruth spent a lot of her time with her. Ruth was quiet as a child, apart from when she had one of her tantrums, which were legendary in the family. She had a lot of friends, though she maintained that she was a shy girl until she became friends with Karen Middleton in Grammar School. She was an intelligent child who enjoyed reading and won a place at Pentre Grammar where she gained O-levels and could have gone to university. But that didn't fit with the expectations of a working-class woman at that time or with her family's finances.

So, at sixteen she started a pre-nursing course at Llwynypia college, while still living at home. She worked hard and in 1961 she gained a place at the Cardiff Royal Infirmary to train as a nurse. The training was hard but rewarding, the matron was very strict as were the rules they lived under. Ruth has banned any stories being told now about her and her friends drinking adventures then and later, so I'll leave it to you to share those later. But it seems that she and her

lifelong friends, Anne, Maggs, Mena and Sue worked hard and played hard. In the evenings they were usually out in Cardiff and as the nurses' quarters were locked at 10pm they would have to climb through the windows. Ruth was usually the leader and was somehow able to obtain tickets for the Rugby Internationals for them all. From the second year they all shared a flat over a shop which was not fit for human habitation and would be condemned now. They qualified in September 1964 and Ruth continued to work as a staff nurse at the CRI until she went to Pontypridd Cottage Hospital as a night sister and then in 1969 to East Glamorgan as a sister.

She met her husband John Fell, a merchant seaman toward the end of the sixties and lived in Rhydfelin when they were married. He was a way at sea much of the time and the marriage was not a success, except that Jonathan was born in 1973, and they were divorced in 1975 after which Ruth and Jonathan moved with her Mum and Philip to Penrhys.

Jonathan remembers Ruth talking about the slog of having to walk up the long hill to Penrhys from the bus stop when she returned home from a night shift at East Glamorgan. But before long the family moved to Garth Rd, which has been home ever since and where Jonathan told me Ruth made his childhood fun, happy and secure. He remembers waiting expectantly for her to come home from afternoons, knowing she would have some sweets for him. He remembers days out to Barry Island and Porthcawl amongst other places, always on the train or bus as Ruth didn't want to learn to drive. He remembers his mum on fun filled holidays, full of laughter taken with Philip, Joan, her son Matthew, Brian's daughter Liz and later with Stacey and Ashley. initially in old caravans in Porthcawl when money was tight and in later years in plusher caravans in Brean Sands and Tenby. He also remembers her friendships; with

Mair and Val and the time they spent on the phone discussing work and their nights out to relieve their stress; and with her best friend Jill and their trips with her daughter Danielle to Birmingham and Wembley to watch their shared passion of WWE wrestling.

But it wasn't all good, Ruth liked to take her time when clothes shopping, not a favourite activity of young Jonathan who often demonstrated that he had inherited her ability to throw a legendary tantrum.

Jonathan told me he always knew that she was a nurse, he saw how well respected she was by the people she met, and he remembers that was always proud of her. This pride was evident to me when he showed me the comments that followed the announcement of Ruth's death on the Facebook page "I Trained at East Glamorgan." One hundred and twenty-seven comments, many offering condolences but many more telling their memories of Ruth. The thread is well worth a read if you can. It tells of a highly regarded professional nursing sister, who was extremely well liked and respected; who cared deeply for those in her care, patients students and staff; who had a dry sense of humour and was great fun to work with and to socialise with; who was an inspiration and role model to generations of nurses and who, when it was quiet, used to sneak off for a quite fag in the Duck room.

Jonathan didn't see any of this as he grew up though he realised how professional and knowledgeable she was when he heard her talking about work. What he saw was how hard she worked looking after him and her mum and supporting Philip; coming home from nights, lighting the fire, getting him off to school, doing the daily shop for her mum, getting a few hours sleep then back up for Jonathan. She showed Jonathan by example how to live a good and worthwhile life and impressed on him the importance of hard work.

For years Ruth travelled to work on the bus but finally bit the bullet and learnt to drive, at the same time as Jonathan, when the bus route was cut in 1989. This came in handy when Jonathan lived in Birmingham for seven years, but she never grew to enjoy driving.

It has been hinted that Ruth enjoyed a night out with her friends, she also enjoyed music and went to see many of her favourite artists with Jill including The Eagles, Rod Stewart and Boyzone. She was a voracious reader enjoying mainly factual books, particularly true crime, politics and sport biographies, with the occasional thriller thrown in, this gave her a broad knowledge base and she enjoyed exercising this in pub quizzes and watching TV quiz shows.

In 2002 Ruth reluctantly retired due to back problems, she would have preferred to have carried on working but was now able to indulge her other interests. She went to Spanish classes and she and Jill bought a caravan together in Aberporth. For ten years they spent the summer season there, often joined by their friends Gwyn and Lynne, their friendship having been forged by work and a love of talking. Family and other friends joined them for weekends and holidays making it a home away from home, Jill told me they spent a lot of their time laughing and that she and Ruth often discussed what they wanted at their funerals.

Ruth became a grandma to Oliver in 2009 and loved spending time with him, Jonathan and Oxana in Llantrisant. She and Phillip often babysitting for Oliver and then treating everyone to a takeaway, just one of the many ways she was generous to her family.

Ruth developed throat cancer in 2014 and met it with courage and determination to beat it, which she did. Jill would go with her for chemotherapy and radiotherapy sessions at Velindre and as usual they spent

most of the time laughing. While recovering at home Philip was on hand to get her daily supplement drinks, and her coffee.

From then she determined that worrying about it coming back was not going to spoil her life and told Jonathan that she did not go to bed thinking about cancer.

A suspected frozen shoulder had been causing her pain over the last year, eventually when the diagnosis was confirmed it was a stage four lung tumour- the cancer had metastasized. On the day that she received her stage four diagnosis she arrived home very weak and needed support walking. But Ruth insisted on walking unaided up the steps into the house, later telling Jill that she knew it would be the last time she entered her home. This determination epitomised the last weeks of her life. Her dry sense of humour showed through as she enjoyed adapting Spike Milligan's epitaph and telling people 'See, I told you I was bad!'

She was determined to stay at home and Jonathan was able to achieve this for his mother thanks to the loving help and support he and Ruth received from Jill, Philip, Ashley, Liz, David, Stacey, Oxana and Oliver and of course from the district nurses. In the end she died peacefully at home with Jonathan, Jill, Philip and Ashley.

Again, Ruth was clear how she wanted this Eulogy to end; with an adaption of Actor John Le Messurier's self-penned death notice;

"Ruth Fell conked out the twentieth of February 2019, she sadly misses her family and friends."

And his final words as a message to you her friends and family, "It's all been, rather lovely."

