

Ruth Gibson  
1929 - 2014

Ruth was born on 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1929 in Biddulph Moor in North Staffordshire. Her parents were Joe and Alice Brooks, and she had a younger brother, Syd. Joe and Alice were farmers and, shortly after Ruth was born, they bought a smallholding in Knypersley, where they lived with Alice's parents. Alice's mother – Granny Pyatt – was a serious matriarch who dominated the family.

The smallholding was only 10 acres and Joe and Alice had to work extremely hard to make ends meet. Ruth remembered a hard childhood and described her family as peasants. When a pig was slaughtered all the lean cuts had to be sold and only the fatty parts were kept back for the family. For the rest of her life Ruth hated fatty bacon and would buy lean rashers from Danish pigs.

Each day before school it was Ruth's job to help her mother deliver the milk. Alice carried the milk on a yoke and Ruth would deliver it by hand. When she finally got to school she would be caned for being late. However Ruth clearly was not one to let anyone push her around because she boasted that she used to throw the boys in the nettles.

Ruth had a good brain and would surely have done well if she had been allowed to continue her education. But, at the age of 14, she was told that there was no money for further schooling and she would have to get a job. She went to work in Lewis's, in Stoke-on-Trent, as a clerk in the finance department, where she remembered money arriving via a system of vacuum operated tubes. It's always hard to know what would have happened if circumstances had been different. However it seems likely that, if Ruth had been given the opportunity to carry on at school and then become a professional woman, she would have been a more fulfilled and happier person.

Whilst she was working at Lewis's Ruth met Betty Marsden, who became a close friend. The two girls went on holiday to Butlin's together where they had their photograph taken, sitting on rocks in their swimsuits and looking very glamorous. Ruth was very attractive as a young woman and had great legs, which may have been the result of the sports activities that she got involved in whilst working at Lewis's. She and Betty remained friends for the rest of their lives and Ruth was very upset when she learned that Betty had died two years ago.

In her late teens Ruth began training as a nurse. However, her childhood sweetheart, Trevor Gibson, asked her to marry him and she said "yes", even though she knew that she would have to give up her hopes of nursing (married women were not allowed to be nurses at this time). She and Trevor married in 1950. Trevor adored Ruth and used to refer to her as his "fairy". Betty was born in 1951 and Margaret three years later.

Married women in the 50s were expected to make a career out of being housewives – a role that Ruth never enjoyed – and only to work outside the home if the family income needed supplementing. Ruth took occasional casual jobs, on one occasion in a tyre depot, where she enjoyed the rough and tumble of working life. As a policeman Trevor was entitled to a police house, but this brought its own problems as the police community was very status conscious and inspectors felt that they had the right to walk into their junior staff's houses uninvited. Ruth found her life very frustrating and, as a result, could be extremely difficult to live with – both for her husband and her daughters.

Although family life could sometimes be tense there were also memorable holidays. Trevor and Ruth invested in a frame tent and the family would travel to Wales, taking their cat and dog with them on camping trips. Other holidays were spent on the family farm where Betty and Margaret were able to run wild and wave to the steam train at the bottom of the field. Ruth loved the natural world and taught her daughters the names of flowers and trees.

In the late fifties the family moved to Bebington, on the Wirral, where they lived until Trevor retired. Ruth spent some of the happiest years of her life here. In her mid forties she returned to nursing and started her training from scratch. Although most of the students were younger, there was a group of women of Ruth's age and they became firm friends. Ruth qualified as an SRN and, for some years, ran the eye clinic in Clatterbridge Hospital. She had close friends, money to spend, a degree of independence and work that she enjoyed. She treated herself to a yellow mini and it must have seemed as though she was finally living the life she'd wanted.

When Trevor retired he worked in the shipyard offices for a while but his dream was always to return to the place where he'd grown up. A relative died and left him a house and he and Ruth moved back to Bidulph. For Ruth this meant losing many of the things that had made her life worthwhile, and it would be fair to say that she was not happy with the move.

Betty came to live with Ruth and Trevor, bringing with her her three children – Jonathon, Alex and Katy. Ruth pitched in to support her daughter and grandchildren and Betty is very grateful for her support.

During their retirement Ruth and Trevor loved going to the holiday centre at Bonkseid House in Pitlochry. Ruth retained many fond memories of this time. They had a dog – Princess – who they adored, and they were devastated when she died in 1999. And they enjoyed coach trips to stately homes, which were organised by a local group. Ruth carried on with these after Trevor's death, and was once invited to sit beside a woman who was alone because her husband was policing the miners demonstrations at Orgreave. Ruth refused saying she wasn't having anything to do with people who beat up miners.

Trevor died in 2000 and, from then on, Ruth became a bit of a recluse. She had always enjoyed shopping at charity shops, and had a real eye for a quality bargain. Now she filled the house with her finds and hibernated in a nest of blankets.

Ten years ago it became clear that she wasn't able to look after herself and, after a heart operation, Ruth moved to Somerset where she settled in sheltered housing close to Margaret and her partner Tony. She loved the Somerset countryside and would sometimes catch the bus or steam train to Minehead and have lunch in one of the hotels. She also enjoyed going out for drives with Tony and would relish seeing the honeysuckle in flower and brown cows in the fields.

Over time Ruth's health deteriorated and, with the onset of dementia, she moved into the Manor where two weeks respite care became permanent. This March she was able to move into Dunkirk Memorial House and was one of the first residents of their new dementia wing. Ruth died with her family around her, slipping away quietly and peacefully.

Ruth will be remembered for her strong personality, her generosity to her family and her particular sayings. Everyone who was close to her will remember her telling them to "just shove it in a cupboard", and the family catchphrase of "Look out Trevor, she's on her way".