

Ruth Pickering- Fall City Community Builder

by Sharon Brown

How does one honor or do justice to a person who has had such a great impact on so many of us here in Fall City? Her name is familiar. Her deeds come with significance and longevity. She never draws attention to herself.



Ruth and her brother Clyde.

She is unassuming, yet moves with great purpose and has been largely responsible for bringing us together as a community.

In this November issue, at a time of year when we remember the many things we are grateful for, with a loud shout, we want to say “thank you” to Ruth Pickering for her past service to us as editor-in-chief and now editor emeritus of our own *Fall City Neighbors* newsletter.

Born in Phoenix, Arizona on May 4, 1940, Ruth moved to Oregon with her parents and older brother when she was seven years old. Since Ruth’s grandfather was one of the early pioneers in the Phoenix area, this was a big move for their family. Ruth’s father, who sold and repaired typewriters and office machines, found a job in Corvallis, home of Oregon State University. The family bought a house in a rural area northeast of Corvallis.

Country living agreed with Ruth. “I remember those years as some of my happiest,” Ruth contemplates. “From second to seventh grade I went to Dixie School, a one-room school that was perfect for me! There were only about sixteen students in grades one to eight – only Clifford Hawkes and me in my grade.”



Dixie School in Corvallis, Oregon.

“After a time, Mom began working on the OSU campus, so my brother and I were on our own much of the time, exploring the swamp across the street from our home, catching beetles and butterflies and gaining a love for wild flowers, inspired by my mother and grandmother.”

When Ruth entered the eighth grade, the family moved into Corvallis, a few blocks away from the University. They bought their home for \$4000. It was a fixer-upper...most likely one of the original farmhouses. It was built with square nails and had an old Gravenstein apple tree lodged under Ruth’s bedroom window, where she could venture out at night, treating herself to one of those delicious apples!



Dixie Girls, Ruth in center, back row.

During High School, Ruth’s love for Biology was nurtured by her teacher, Mr. Thaw, who was also getting his PhD from OSU at the time. He offered an advanced class where the students were able to explore all kinds of unique projects. He also helped Ruth get summer jobs in the Zoology Department on campus. When Ruth graduated in 1958, she set her sights on Oregon State, attaining her Zoology degree in three years. She wasn’t all study though. Don’t get on her bad side....she was on the rifle team and I’m sure developed a straight shot! She also loved an evening class in writing poetry.

Ruth met her future husband, Sterling, during college. His major was bio-physics. Upon graduation, both she and Sterling headed for Berkeley where they got married and acquired their PhDs in their respective fields of study. Ruth had her first son, Dorian, mid-thesis....no small task!

They finished their PhDs in 1966 and headed for a two-year post doc research program in Tuebingen, a University town in south Germany. Ruth polished up her German (taken at Oregon State) and became quite fluent. She left Germany in 1968 and went to Corvallis to stay with her parents and to give birth to her second son Erik, while Sterling was finding his family a place to reside in Bellevue before he began his second post doc at the University of Washington. After he received a position in 1970 at the University of Alberta in Canada, Sterling and Ruth went their separate ways and Ruth began working part time at the UW while she raised her two boys. (continued on page 12)

Ruth Pickering (Continued from Page 11) In the early 1970s Ruth bought an old home in the Montlake district, which was next door to a friend she had gotten to know at UW. “My friend Yvonne and her family, with children nearly the same ages as mine, made a tremendous difference in my life. We learned so much from them and supported each other in many ways,” says Ruth. “We shared a garden in my back yard for many years.”

By 1980 Ruth was working full time at the Fred Hutchison Research Center, doing “scientific gardening” – growing cells in tissue culture. A new biotech company emerged out of that called Genetic Systems, where Ruth first started as a facilities manager. She helped design the labs, set up support systems and managed the team. When the company grew and the facilities position was no longer fun, she made her way back to the lab and continued in that capacity until her retirement in 1993. It turned out to be a blessing that she was able to retire then, as it allowed her to spend some very special time with her mother before she passed away in 1994.

Ruth, still living in the Montlake house, over time began renting out some of the rooms. For thirty years it was there that her roots went deep and her personal growth took on new dimensions. When the boys were out on their own, she got involved with “Ecology Action” – a group that taught bio-intensive gardening around the world. And since Genetic Systems was one of the first companies to work with the AIDS virus (they made antibodies that were used to test blood for the blood banks), Ruth was drawn to become a volunteer to Shanti, a hospice group that offered support to people with terminal diseases, many with AIDS.

In 1994, Ruth met her current partner, Linda, who was then living in Klahanie. They delight in sharing strong scientific backgrounds and a love of the country. They chose to move to Fall City thirteen years ago, hoping that with lots of floodplain in the area, it would not develop so quickly. They found a neat little place on an acre near Lake Alice. “I enjoyed putting in a garden,” says Ruth. “The soil was great...between the rocks!” (Recently they moved to five acres in the Lake Alice area, where they inherited fruit trees, berries, large communities of voles... and space to have alpacas.)

‘Though retired, Ruth could not stay still. She went to a Washington Tilth conference for organic farmers in Washington and met many farming families in the Snoqualmie Valley. In the fall of 1995 she helped organize a series of potlucks to increase contact among local farmers. Out of that has grown Sno-Valley Tilth...all organic farmers who encourage and help each other along, claiming Ruth as their “grandma” who made it all happen!

Despite a couple of tough years when Ruth’s older son died and then she was diagnosed in 1999 with breast cancer, as a survivor she stepped forward once again to make a difference in her world. She started working with the *Neighbors* newsletter in 2000. “This is when I started my ‘love affair’ with Fall City. Getting to know the people here in town and appreciating the uniqueness of Fall City really changed my life. I believe in community and becoming editor of the newsletter connected me to Fall City in a way that otherwise would’ve never happened,” explained Ruth. “I think we face some real challenges in the coming years, and I hope we can work together to maintain the warmth of this special town.”

After several years as editor, Ruth began to broaden her Valley contacts and to serve on the Board of the Snoqualmie Valley Historical Museum. She chaired the Board group which re-published *Fall City in the Valley of the Moon* in 2004. That project made it possible to offer some local skills to Jack Kelley, as he began what would become the “bible” of Fall City history. “Working with Jack and Judy Kelley on Jack’s book for two-and-a-half intense years was one of the most deeply satisfying (and exhausting!) experiences of my life,” says Ruth. ‘Blood, sweat and tears’, as the saying goes!” And in the midst of all this Ruth also became a grandma!!

As Ruth has now passed the baton of the *FC Neighbors* editorship to Becky Davie, she currently works with the Fall City Historical Society. The Society is setting up systems to ensure that all donations to the Fall City Archives will be responsibly recorded, catalogued and preserved. Ruth goes most mornings to work at the Historical Society office in the Methodist Church. Their first big project will be the **Fall City Memory Book project**, starting this Fall.

We love you, Ruth, and are forever grateful for who *you* are and all that you’ve given to us as a community. Your handprints are seen throughout our town!! We have been blessed by all your efforts and will look forward to how you surprise us in the future as we anticipate with excitement your new project. We will be on the lookout for more information in the upcoming newsletters on how we can participate in the “memory book.” This could be fun!



Ruth with Jack Kelley