



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Ellen Brown, sister-in-law of Dolores Jean Brown Pinney, looks at the back of one of her favorite of Pinney's paintings in her shop at her Hermiston home. Brown set aside numerous of her sister-in-law's paintings to give to family members.

Lust for Life

Irrigon woman was a model, artist, architect during her 90 years

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

One of the last photos taken of Dolores Jean Brown Pinney shows the 90-year-old woman with a halo of white hair, looking into the distance and smiling.

If you pick up an old fashion magazine, you might see that same smile.

Pinney, who went by her middle name, "Jean," was no stranger to being photographed. In the 1940s, she was a cover model for magazines such as Redbook, Pageant, Salute and Look. A spread in Life Magazine was one of her first national breaks, which started a short, prolific career in the spotlight.

Pinney passed away on February 15, a few months before her 91st birthday, but her family members are still reminiscing about her life.

The rise from a small, rural upbringing to the pages of national magazines was a short, somewhat unexpected path for the Irrigon High School graduate.

Pinney spent her youth entering beauty contests locally, such as "Miss Umatilla Ordnance Depot" in 1943 — her first contest. After graduating from Irrigon High School in 1944, she studied for a year at Eastern Oregon College.

"She was a top student in art," said her sister-in-law Ellen Brown.

After a year in La Grande Pinney moved to Los Angeles, where her great-aunt lived, and began working as a model there. She won the "Miss Hollywood" contest in 1947, at the age of 21. She soon moved to New York and signed with the John Robert Powers modeling agency, after which she was featured in several magazines.

Pinney saved most of the articles and mementos from her modeling career and Ellen Brown pores over them, remembering her sister-in-law.

Ellen has fond memories of Pinney from their shared youth, as well.

"She was two years ahead of me in school," Ellen said. "Her family lived about a quarter-mile away. I moved here at the end of the school year, and Jean asked me to ride the family bikes with her uptown. She said, 'I'll introduce you to all the students.' I thought, how nice of her to be so neighborly."

Born in Weed, California, in June of 1926, Pinney's early life was a bit of a vagabond existence.

"They traveled around picking crops during the Great Depression," said her nephew, Daryl Brown. "Oregon, Washington, Montana. From first grade through high school, they attended 13 different schools in different cities —

See PINNEY/4C



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Dolores Jean Brown Pinney was a model in the 1940s and 1950s in Los Angeles and New York. Here she is on the cover of the July 1948 cover of Redbook Magazine.

"Going from Irrigon to LA and New York. She was doing a lot of things. It was not your average person's life."

— Daryl Brown, Dolores Jean Brown Pinney's nephew



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Dolores Jean Brown Pinney in 2015 in Hermiston.