

Tribal Elder Feature

'She taught us to be independent'

RICKARD continued
from front page

home in the Tribe's Elder housing complex. Youngest daughter, Mary Rickard, takes care of Ruth there at night.

"She partied with us right up until she had her stroke," says oldest daughter Laurie Cathcart, who lives in Portland.

"We always worked, though, by gum," says Ruth, who gets around today mostly in a wheelchair. She walks mainly with a helping hand. "We never stayed home because we couldn't go to work."

She was the type, Laurie says, who would call from work and say, "Get ready. As soon as I get home, we're going down to North Fork." The family lived in Stayton and Ruth would take all four children along with Soy, their white Samoyed, wearing sunglasses, up the Santiam River to go swimming.

The family included Thelma Ruth and her four children: Mark GROSSER, from her marriage to her first husband, Duwayne GROSSER, along with Laurie, Melia and Mary, children from Ruth's second marriage to Gerald Rickard.

"I said I wanted a big family," says Ruth, "and boy did I get one quick."

"When she was married to Duwayne GROSSER," says lifelong friend and fellow Tribal Elder Joyce Ham, "they did a lot traveling, boat racing. They went all over in competitions. Devil's Lake at the coast."

GROSSER, a log trucker, was killed in a truck accident.

Ruth remarried, and when that marriage didn't last, she began working two jobs. As a single mother for most of the years when her children were growing up, she almost always held two jobs.

"I don't know how she did it," Laurie says recently from her home in Portland. "She tried to keep us in baby sitters, but we were a rebel-



Photo by Ron Karten

lious bunch."

"She worked and raised us, and sent us to Catholic school and went to school herself and got more education so she could get a better job," Mark says.

Today, Mark is a tattoo artist with MPG tattoo shops in Salem and Lincoln City.

"She was a good mother," he adds.

"She raised us to go to Catholic school," Laurie says. "She tried to do the right thing, thinking that a Catholic education was the best thing for us."

"We'd take family trips when my two littlest sisters were younger," Mark remembers. "She took us down to the redwoods and Crater Lake, and that kind of stuff."

"Mom was always getting me into activities," he says, "since my Dad died when I was young. She always had me in the Boy Scouts and we had plenty of friends around."

"She was a light-hearted person," Laurie says. "She never lectured or told us what to do. She was never critical."

Leading by example

"By example," is how Laurie remembers her mother's teaching

Name: Thelma Ruth Rickard

Age: 77

Born: Grand Ronde, Ore.

Education: Graduated Willamina High School, business classes.

Family: Marriage to Duwayne GROSSER, son Tribal member Mark GROSSER; marriage to Gerald Rickard, daughters Tribal members Laurie Cathcart, and Melia and Mary Rickard; grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Quote: "I remember lots of fun."

style. "She taught us to be independent. And all of us girls are single like she was!"

"I'd come home and they'd have dinner ready," Ruth says. "Laurie mainly. I told them what to do and they got it done. Even if they got mad, they got it done. Laurie was a good sister."

"She told me that I was the oldest and to be responsible for my sisters," Laurie says. "So, I made sure they cleaned up and, once in awhile, they'd turn around and beat me up."

"Mom taught me to cook and can," Mark says. "Grandmother taught me to sew, drive and pull weeds. My mom is the reason why I was director of maintenance for this place (in the 1990s). When we were growing up, I was the man in the house. If the dryer broke and I was 10 years old, she'd say, 'Fix it.' Between that and pretty much growing up in my grandfather's (GROSSER's father) shop. Also from her, I got myself motivation."

Ruth remembers: "When they were little, they had to earn their own clothes for school and they had to get a job every summer to provide money. We made our own way. And I think that has taught the kids how to work."

Ruth grew up in a house where there was plenty — not because they had so much but because everybody worked and they made use of every scrap.

And Ruth followed the tradition in her home.

"She canned everything," Mark says. "She froze fish. I used to fish constantly. We lived next to a creek (in Stayton). We'd freeze most, and mom would can some. She canned everything from peaches to chicken. Everything that grows."

"When she moved out," Mark continues, referring to when Ruth moved to Alaska for almost a decade, "I got rid of those damn cans and hoped to never see them anymore."

"Then I had to go out and get some more," Ruth says, referring to when she returned from Alaska.

"She was a way old-school Indian," Mark says. "Nothing got wasted. Everything got canned."

"There was one time about 30 years ago," Mark says, "when I was driving truck for Norbest, and I swung

by Mom's house and left two live turkeys in the yard. It was a fenced yard and that kept them in, and I had it planned that I wanted to kill them when I got home later. I drove back by later and says to Mom, 'Don't kill them. I want to do it later.'

"And she says, 'Too late.'"

"I love that story about the turkeys," says Mark's wife, Patti, "because it shows she don't waste nothing."

Laurie says that when Ruth saw somebody with more Indian blood than she had, "She'd call them 'a real Indian.'"

Raised on Grand Ronde Road

Thelma Ruth Smith grew up down Grand Ronde Road, a couple of blocks from the current Tribal campus.

"You could practically hit it with a rock from here," Mark says during an interview in the Tribal Governance Building. He came along with his wife, Patti, and his mother.

She lived on the Smith farm off the extension of Grand Ronde Road across from where the grade school once sat, and down some from the original Tribal government office.

"That house is still standing," her sister, Tribal Elder Lillian (Lynn) Berray, says. Nine years younger than Ruth, Lynn is retired and living in Vancouver, Wash., where she also makes Santas sold by Spirit Mountain Casino's gift shops. "And the woman who lives there says it has some sort of historic designation."

Her parents, John and deceased Tribal Elder Celia Smith, were good farmers, if a little strict, according to Lynn.

"Maybe it was the times, but our parents didn't tell us anything," she says. "The sayings I grew up with were things like, 'Little pictures are to be seen and not heard.' And when we'd go shopping, they'd say, 'Don't touch that,' though later, of course, you learned that touching was a way of learning. 'Don't cry,' they'd say. 'Nobody wants to hear you whining.'"

Ruth says that while growing up, the children helped around the farm although there was quite a separation between children. Her brother, Jim, who passed away two years ago, was nine years older than she, just as she was nine years older than Lynn.

But Lynn says that they never really felt like only children because the family took in cousins and foster children along the way.

"I always helped Dad out in the barn," says Ruth. "I had summer chores and winter chores. We had cats and also work horses. My sister helped in the house. And mom worked all summer at the cannery here (in Grand Ronde). My folks were always working."

"Ruth and I had to hoe the strawberries before we could go swimming," says lifelong friend and Tribal Elder Diane (Linton) Giffen.

Ruth's father also worked for



Photos courtesy of the Ruth Rickard family

Ruth and her first husband, Duwayne GROSSER. Duwayne is holding son, Mark.