

Lori Bell's story of

# Judy



Judy is petite and fair, with a dimpled smile, straight hair, and hazel eyes. In 1943 in Regina, Saskatchewan, she was born Judith Diane Robertson to Kenneth Robertson and Ruby Merle McInnis.

Ruby was the last born of six girls; Jennie and Alice died from the Spanish influenza in 1918, sparing Edith, Margaret (Marg), Mary (Bun), and Ruby. Judy's Gram, born Louise Regina Undrider, had come from Odessa, Russia to marry Edward Bruce McInnis of Prince Edward Island in 1903.

Ruby grew up in Regina, where her father Edward was a well known politician and owned a printing company. She and Kenneth married, and Judy was born. Ignored at an early age by her mother who increasingly turned to alcohol to placate her own unhappiness, at least she was her Gram's favourite granddaughter. Joanne was born two years after Judy. She had a darker complexion and hair colouring and, according to Judy, a different personality: "She would never clean her side of the room!". Judy, practical and analytical, looked after her younger sister most of her growing up years. Judy dreamed of the day when she would be a "mommy" with her own children.

Judy spent the first few years of life in Regina while her father Ken taught in the Air Force. Her Gram, Grampa, and Aunt Marg moved to Vancouver from Regina, and, in 1945 when Judy was 2 years old, the family of four joined them on the coast. Her father attended the University of British Columbia's first pharmacy program and Gram and Grampa gave them their house on 19th near UBC. Judy's grandparents moved into another house on 34th Avenue in the Kerrisdale area.

My Mom's earliest memory was sitting on the front porch of the house on 19th in Vancouver at about five years of age impressed by the snowfall which had covered the front steps. She also recalls walking to a nearby store on Dunbar Street for her first school supplies. What made that occasion memorable was her companion; her mother Ruby, who rarely paid her much attention, was with her that day.

It was 1949, when Judy was six that Gram became a widow. The same year Ken opened a drug store in the neighbourhood. Ken was a disapproving and critical man, and Judy felt he judged her harshly. She also remembers him fighting with her mother Ruby, and later heard from her half sister that he also abused his second wife during violent fights in front of their three children. In the summer of 1950, and Ken and Ruby divorced, and eventually Judy and her sister moved with her mother and new husband to New Westminster, BC. Ruby's second husband, Amos, was also abusive. She frequently drank and paid little attention to her own health or the welfare of her daughters Judy and Joanne.

Judy started Grade 4 in New Westminster, and despite her mother's behaviour, adjusted well to the new environment; she always liked school. She also met a classmate named Ernie. She provided Ernie with guidance and advice missing from her own childhood, necessitated by his rebellious and wayward activities. While tolerating violent episodes between her mother and step-father at home, taking care of her little sister, lecturing Ernie, and attending Lester Pearson high school, my Mom's life suddenly changed. She had just started Grade 10 when her mother died. Ruby had been drinking a lot and not eating much, for quite some time. Judy took the bus to see her in during that month or so that she was in the hospital.

Aunt Marg came to stay with her and Joanne, who arrived to an empty fridge and no sawdust to feed the furnace. Then, in October shortly after starting 10th grade, Judy was out for a coke with her friend Ernie, when Aunt Marg told her over the phone to come home. Judy and Ernie took the bus back together and Gram came over to tell her, Aunt Jo, and Aunt Marg that Ruby had passed away in the hospital. Ernie stayed the night to comfort Judy.

Amos, Ruby's husband, had taken off before Ruby went to the hospital. He left periodically when they fought, and sometimes wouldn't come back for days. This time he had left for good.

Ruby was buried in a cemetery behind Central Park in Burnaby, near her father's resting place. Judy and Joanne were flown back out to Regina where they were placed in their Aunty Bun's home with their Uncle and four cousins. There was only one bathroom in the house, and miles of trudging through the snow that winter between the house and school, four times each day. Judy's misery that year lasted until June that year when they took the train back to Vancouver only to be replaced with another disappointment. Their father met them at the train station.

Ken hadn't been in Judy's life since she was about seven years old, but still worked at the pharmacy in Dunbar. The three of them went to live at West 21st Avenue and by fall that year Ken's second wife moved in with them. Kelly, Judy and Joanne's first half sister, was born in spring of the following year, and Judy had to look after the baby while her stepmother returned to work. During her last year of high school, Judy and Joanne, couldn't tolerate living with their stepmother any longer and went to live with Aunty Marg, who was still at the house on 34th Avenue where she cared for Gram.

Judy went into nursing at Vancouver General Hospital Nurses Residence after she graduated from high school in 1961. Her hopes of becoming a mother were closer to coming true than she knew, but not in the way she envisioned. Her first boyfriend, Paul, came from what she describes as a functioning family and she got along well with Paul's mother. They even invited her away on holidays to the Oregon coast after Paul and Judy graduated from high school. Paul's mother gave Judy the doll she wanted but never got for her pre-adolescent birthdays, when she got into nursing school. When Paul's father passed away and they broke up during Paul's turmoil, Judy was devastated and her hopes dashed. She met Don soon afterward. By the time Paul recovered from the loss of his father it was too late; my mom was on her way to fulfilling her childhood ambition.

Judy and Don were married April 11th, 1963 and moved to Victoria, BC where Don worked in the Woodward's camera department. Their son Donnie was born December 1963 after a long and difficult labour. Around the same time, Judy's father and stepmom had a second daughter. Judy's half brother came into the world the same year as me, her only daughter, in 1967. Gram died in 1968, the winter just before my youngest brother Darren was born. By that time my mom and my dad moved back from Vancouver Island and were living in North Vancouver. Judy was raising the three of us and Don wasn't around much. My mom let me listen to record albums, looked after me, and gave me dolls. She also didn't like me sucking my thumb and encouraged me not to by applying bitter tasting nail polish! Don and Judy divorced in 1974. We went to live in a condominium complex in North Vancouver. Judy became involved with an older man with a British accent who had two daughters. She was drawn to his intelligence and wander lust, however, mom decided after a few years that the relationship wasn't going to last. She was adventurous, bright, and attractive, and within a short time she was dating her next husband who she met while learning to sail. Judy and Bob decided on a house that was next to the very same house on 19th Avenue that she and her sister lived in with her parents between 1945 and 1950.

My mom's interest and experience with care giving along with her organizational skills led her to starting a home based daycare sometime shortly after we moved to the house on 19th. She eventually went back to school to become a pharmacy technician, a job that requires the kind of precision and fussiness my mom possessed. She also continued to enjoy cooking, and often talked about nutrition and diet. Her concern with weight management and fitness took the whole family to the gym for aerobics classes. She enrolled me in ballet classes when I expressed an interest in dancing, and later supported me while I

pursued classes to become a lifeguard and swimming instructor. Mom rarely participated in leisure or recreational activities as a child, and she wanted her kids to have all the privileges she was denied. Her oldest son was the source of tremendous worry, however, and mom considered whether her divorce with our dad was the cause of his rebellion. Mom describes her youngest as highly sensitive and overwhelmed by changes. Just going on an outing to the beach when Darren was very young was an ordeal because he would have a tantrum if he came into contact with the sand! Judy definitely had her hands full in those early years as a young mother.

Judy and her second husband divorced in 1986. She was unhappy with his behaviour and choices, and felt they should have separated years earlier, but saw the marriage as a way for her children to have a good childhood. Beach outings and teenage rebellion aside, her children were afforded upper middle class advantages and many opportunities Judy had never experienced during her own childhood.

By this time, the children were grown up and independent. On her own again and facing an opportunity for a fresh start, Judy got together with her third husband. Remember the childhood sweetheart who was with her the day her own mother died? Ernie came back to Judy, they got reacquainted, and he professed his undying love for her. They married in 1989.

Over the years Judy settled into her life with as a parent of grown children, and then the next generation added to her joy. Kenny, Dylan, Sam, Hunter, Brittney, Brooklynne, Daniella, and her step grandchildren Nick, Chris, Steven and Christopher, have also enjoyed her as their “Grandy”. She took care of her young grandchildren when ever time allowed. They went camping and traveling with Grandy and Grampy, and there are many cherished photographs and memories. Judy was an exceptional grandparent to Dylan, who was diagnosed with primary pulmonary hypertension as a toddler; she was the only family member outside of his own parents who was able to care for him on his own. Her pharmaceutical expertise and skill facilitated her ability to look after Dylan’s medication requirements, and she afforded Dylan some independence from his parents during his childhood. Judy was devastated when she faced loss again in her role as a grandparent with the unexpected grief with Hunter’s sudden death at age seven. When Dylan passed away two years later, it was almost too much to bear. Judy continues to celebrate her angels in heaven and the joy they bring to her life. She in turn provides comfort to her own children and their families by spoiling them with her gourmet cooking, insistent pampering, hearty laughter, and energetic sense of adventure.

Judy has retired from working at the pharmacy department in the Penticton hospital where she has lived with Ernie for 23 years. She seems to keep extremely busy: between visiting and traveling with family and friends, looking after their dog Simba, home designing and decorating, cleaning , cooking, reading ,and doing Pilates, she doesn’t know where the time goes. Her plans include traveling to the Maritime provinces where she’s never been. Knowing my mother’s determination, she’ll get there.