

Ruth Brady Harvie - Our Jell-O Girl

by Lynne Belluscio

It hardly seems possible that it was 14 years ago that we opened the Jell-O Museum and little did anyone know that it would still be a popular tourist stop. It seems that our attendance grows each year and this year the folks are still stopping by to see what the Jell-O Museum has to offer and for the 14th year, Ruth Harvie will be on hand to greet our visitors.

Ruth has been with us since the beginning. She still remembers in the spring of 1997 when someone asked her if she'd like to be a docent at the new Jell-O Gallery. She wasn't too sure what a docent had to do, so she went home and looked the word up in the dictionary. Ruth has a lot of stories to tell – about Jell-O and about the people who come here to visit the museum.

She likes to tell about the man who asked if he could take pictures and Ruth said that was no problem. He promptly pointed to a beautiful oil painting of a lemon Jell-O and said, "Ok, I'll take that one!" Ruth tells the story about Rowntree's Gelatin from England. It's not powdered, but instead comes in a block like Jell-O Jigglers. Kids like to take off a small slice of the gelatin and eat it and then put the rest back in the box. When their mom would make the gelatin, she never knew how much water to add, because she wasn't sure "how much they nipped." A fellow from England came in one day and said "We never nipped!! We ate the whole thing!"

One of my favorite stories that Ruth tells is about chocolate Jell-O: "You know, at one time they made chocolate Jell-O and it was one of the seven fruit flavors. So now when I eat a Hershey bar, I can count it as one of my fruit servings for the day."

Ruth has a unique ability to get people interested in the Jell-O Gallery, even if they don't think they want to be here - the man who's with his wife, who would rather be anywhere else than at the Jell-O Gallery. Ruth will come up to him and say, "I'd really like to show you something that is very special here, that

you might like." Sometimes she points out the crystal radio that's built in an old Jell-O box. Sometimes it's the results of EEG machine that shows the brain waves of Jell-O. Or sometimes she mentions that he might be more interested in the 1908 Cadillac in the basement and down he goes to take a look.

In the museum business, we all wish we could clone people like Ruth. They are called "interpreters" for a reason. They can interpret the story of the museum for the visitor and keep their attention. Ruth gets fan mail. "Ruth - many thanks for the wonderful presentation you delivered to our group this past Saturday. The group enjoyed the visit at the Jell-O Museum and the topic of conversation at lunch was favorite Jell-O flavors! You are a terrific "docent" and I look forward to my next visit to the museum." "Ruth brought sunshine into our hearts and was funny in telling Jell-O facts and its history. LeRoy is a delightful place to visit."

Probably one of the toughest jobs, is to meet and greet mentally disabled people. We have quite a few people visiting from group homes and various institutions. It's very hard to know exactly what they comprehend, but Ruth handles each situation in a kind and respectful way, that is very much appreciated by the staff that bring the folks to the Jell-O Gallery. The phone will ring and the caller will ask, "Is Ruth working this weekend? Oh good. We want to make sure she's going to be there when we come." Ruth has worked weekends from the very first season. No one else wanted to work every weekend. But as Ruth tells the story, her car just seems to pull into the driveway, sometimes, even when she's not scheduled to work.

Ruth, as many of you know, has lived in LeRoy for a long time. She and her husband, Ross Harvie, ran the Smoke Shop on Main Street from 1968 to 1979. Ruth was born in Denver, Colorado, where she spent some of her time on her grandmother's ranch. In 1944, she met her first husband,



Russell Harvie, who was stationed at nearby Lowry Field. They were married January 28, 1945. He was shipped out to Japan, where he was killed in a freak accident less than a year later.

Ruth met his twin brother, Ross and they were married on Ruth's birthday, October 26, 1946. "He was the best birthday present I ever had." The Harvie brothers were from LeRoy. Ross and Ruth

honeymooned in LeRoy and never left. They were married 44 years and had six children. Ross died in 1990. Ruth has 12 grandchildren and "about" 16 great-grandchildren spread out over 12 different states. The Jell-O Gallery just wouldn't be the same without Ruth. She has a brick in the Jell-O Brick Road which says it all: "Ruth Brady Harvie Our Jell-O Girl."

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