

Memories: Bruce Runion Russell

By his daughter, Dawn Russell

Bruce Russell was born on February 12, 1927. His mother was Bessie Jane Runion Marks and his stepfather was Cecel Marks. Bruce's father passed away when he was very young. He had three brothers: Lester, Sam and Larry. While growing up, Bruce lived with his family in North Tonawanda, NY, near Buffalo. His mother worked as a telephone operator and his stepfather worked for the New York Central Railway.

While growing up, Bruce was very close to his Aunt Ruth and his cousin Lyle. They would go to their aunt's cottage in the St. Lawrence area quite a lot. This is where Bruce learned to water ski and found his love for boating. At age sixteen, Bruce worked for P&H Wrecking Yard, learning the skill of tearing apart car engines. Four days after his eighteenth birthday, Bruce was drafted into the U.S. Army. He was stationed in Germany on February 16, 1945, where he was an MP (Military Police). After World War II ended, he was recruited as a guard for the Nuremberg Trials.

Bruce was discharged in 1948 and returned home to his family who had moved to West Walworth. Bruce would attend the Walworth dances at the old auction hall on Route 441 in Walworth. This is where he met his wife-to-be, Bernice Allaart. They courted for a while and married on July 3, 1949, at the Walworth Methodist Church. Bernice's father wouldn't let them get married on their wedding day until the potato field was done, so Bruce went over to the farm and helped Bernice so they could be married that day. They honeymooned in Niagara Falls.

They lived in Palmyra for a short while and then moved to Walworth. They first lived in the house located at the corner of Rt. 441 and Rt. 350, then moved to Walworth-Palmyra Road in the old Hoffman house. In 1965 Bruce and Bernice purchased a house on Walworth-Ontario Road from Tom Teske, Sr. This is where they would raise their family for many years to come. They had five children: Ronald, Dawn, Carol, Gary and Krisanne, and 13 grand-children.

Bruce worked in the automotive field specializing in auto body work. He was known as the best frame repair man in Wayne County. On his own time, Bruce was always repairing friends and family cars, never charging a dime, sometimes using the barter system. One of his close friends, Nelson Nieves, would work alongside Bruce at the auto repair shop. Bruce's favorite car, out of several he owned, was a blue and white 1957 Pontiac. Bernice was a homemaker after having their first child, Ronald; then she and Bruce raised many foster children together.

In the younger years of their marriage they would make many trips to Lake Eaton with family and friends such as the Reybroucks. Bruce had a love of camping. He was an Assistant Boy Scoutmaster and would take the boys to Babcock-Hovey Boy Scout Camp each summer and winter. Every spring Bruce would be out in the driveway sanding and varnishing his boat. Eventually, he was to sell the boat and get a pool. The second pool for the family he put in by himself. It was a very hard task and he said "I will never do that again." The family enjoyed many years of swimming in that pool, so it was all worth it. When younger, Bruce was a lifeguard. I would ask him "Did you ever have to save a drowning person?" and his reply was "I never had to and that's what makes for a good lifeguard."



Bruce Russell (left) and the Suwijn family



Pool installed by Bruce Russell



Bruce and Bernice Russell

He was very family oriented. I remember him barbecuing, swimming, mowing the yards, gardening with our mom, fixing people's cars, camping, and snowmobiling. The old kerosene stove still sits in the shed at the house on Walworth-Ontario Road, where he would repair snowmobiles on those cold winter nights. He also had a love of cooking. He would make homemade waffles, fudge with coconut and his special recipe of stewed tomato soup. Every Friday night Bruce and Bernice would grocery shop and stop by Youngman's Variety store for a cherry coke. Our dad used to take me to Wick's Hardware when I was little; Mr. Wick would always have a cookie jar and offer me a cookie.

Bruce had a kind, caring, gentle spirit. He knew the true meaning of sacrificial love. Those who knew him believed this to be so. He loved our mom very much and took care of her until the end of her life in March of 2004. Nine weeks later, on May 18, 2004, he passed in his sleep. They say it was from a broken heart. We, their children, will never forget all the great memories growing up, thanks be to our Mom and Dad for deciding to raise us in the wonderful community of Walworth.