

In Memory of Rosalyn Grace Gardner Jerome

"Rosalyn Jerome is an amazing woman!" Or so says Dr. Roland Larter of Kittson Memorial Healthcare Center. In fact, he seizes every opportunity to introduce Rose Jerome as one of the most extraordinary women he has ever met.

Rosalyn Grace Gardner Jerome, age 71, was born January 31, 1932 near the Canadian border town of Neche, North Dakota to Frank and Eva Gardner. As the third oldest of 10 children she was expected to help at home with housework and with watching the younger children. At the age of six, her family moved to St. Vincent, Minnesota and Rose attended school there through the eighth grade. Rose's large family was always strapped for money so in order to buy clothes for school, she, at the young age of nine, began working outside the home.

Rose met the love of her life, Leonard Jerome, when she was just fourteen years old. As Rose's uncle Ernie Grumbo returned on the train from a tour of duty after World War II he met a young man also returning to northwest Minnesota from the war. The next weekend while at a dance at the Pembina Hall, Uncle Ernie introduced young Rose to his newly found friend Leonard Jerome. After dating for one and half years, Rose and Leonard were married in 1948 at the St. Vincent Catholic Church by Father Swanson. Rose was just sixteen years old.

Rose and Leonard started a family almost immediately and by the time Rose was nineteen years old she was a mother to three young children. Rose's illness came on slowly over the summer months of 1951. What started as nausea progressed to severe headaches and stumbling, and after walking into the hospital in Altona, Manitoba, she rode out three months later in a wheel chair with a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis. Virgil Bockwitz offered to fly Rose and Leonard to Minneapolis for further testing at the university hospital and while there the doctors confirmed the diagnosis of MS. When she left the university hospital on the fourth of July 1952, she was told she would never bear any more children and she would never be able to care for her home again.

But Rose and Leonard had other things in mind! Leonard set to work almost immediately building exercise machines for Rose to use. Day after day Rose worked those machines. With exercise, Rose's upper body became stronger and after being tied in a wheel chair for over year, she finally was able to sit alone. Eventually

Rose was able to stand when Leonard built a device that tied Rose to the kitchen counters so that Rose could cook and bake for her young family.

As Rose grew stronger, she also felt better, and much to the doctors surprise, she became pregnant with her fourth child, Jimmy. Children, numbers five, six, seven, eight, and nine, came along thereafter. About this time, Laveme Swan was working in the social service office of Kittson County. She asked Rose to tell her the story of her health problems and offered to take Rose to Bemidji to see a specialist. After hearing Rose's story, the doctor asked to look at her teeth. As he pulled back the gums, he noticed a black line running the length of her gums. He told her that he thought she had been mis-diagnosed, and that she actually had all the symptoms of lead poisoning. Rose thought back and remembered all those years ago helping her neighbor paint the new addition to their home, and she remembered all those sickening fumes as she had painted with her head inside the bathroom closets. Rose spent the next three months in Thief River Falls undergoing intensive therapy and did progress to the point of being able to walk with the aid of a walker. Child number ten was born eight years after the birth of child number nine, and after this pregnancy Rose's body never did recover to its previous point.

Because Rose had been in a wheel chair since the age of 19 her children were an immense help to her as they learned to cook and clean at a young age. Rose remembers washing clothes and setting them all on the kitchen table. When the children came from school, they would hang them on the line to dry. Even with all the hardship, the children were happy.

Rose's medical problems did not end with the diagnosis of lead poisoning as throughout the years she has endured back surgery, a mastectomy, and due to hypertensive blindness in both eyes, the loss of her left eye, which today she wears an eye prosthesis. Even with all the hardship Rose endured throughout her life, she has maintained a positive outlook.

Her determined nature and friendly manner is an inspiration to everyone she meets. Today Rose spends her days listening to talking books she receives weekly from the Minnesota Association for the Blind, watching her favorite soaps in the afternoons, and playing a mean game of Bingo.

Rosalyn Jerome certainly was one amazing woman, wife, mother and homemaker.