

'Sisters'

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always picked on her, but she never thought of getting back at them, she said smiling.

During their most recent visit to Pickett's Charge, the Sunflower Sisters shared photos, memories and smiles as they recalled some of their exploits.

They were next-door neighbors on Franklin Street and lived across the street from the old Hoffman's Bakery and a grove of pine trees where the girls liked to play. Asa Gary built his family's home, which had indoor plumbing and electricity, but no radio, in 1925.

Evenings they liked to sit on the front porch swing and sing, or visit friends who had radios. Their favorite programs were "Amos 'n Andy" and "Fibber McGee and Molly."

The girls enjoyed singing in the choir at the Shavertown United Methodist Church. Ruby set an all-time record - she sang in four different church choirs at one time.

"It was a good way to get out of the house," she said.

Beatrice usually got stuck ironing and washing dishes ("You see, I was the oldest.") while Ruby helped her mother with yard work.

Middle child Helen, who also had to help wash dishes, loved to go with her father on his truck. "I'd get out my songbook and sing the whole time," she said.

The two families raised many of their own vegetables and canned fruits for the winter, which Helen and Ruby loved to raid. "Especially the peaches," Ruby grinned.

Beatrice's first attempt at baking still draws chuckles - she forgot to add sugar to a rhubarb pie. "Was it bitter!" she said laughing.

The Garys had lots of animals, which Asa brought home on his truck. They were fun to have around, but the sisters said the sheep would wake them at 4 a.m. with a "bla-a-at! Bla-a-at!"

In nearby Fern Brook was a beer garden, where the girls' fathers liked to stop. Not far away was the old Fern Brook Park, where the girls liked to sneak a quick ride on the carousel, jumping off before they were caught. Occasionally they would get tickets to big band concerts there when they were older.

Ruby went for her first roller coaster ride at Fern Brook, with a Hopi man who worked in the park's summer "Indian show." She wrote to him and his family on the reservation for several years afterward.

Another forbidden treat was to hop the caboose of the train which chugged past the house every day. They were never caught.

The girls did everything together. Ruby married Doris's cousin, Jim Oberst, making them sisters-in-law as well as cousins-in-law and best friends.

Childhood sweethearts, Ruby and Jim Oberst and Doris and Bob Roberts even eloped together 54 years ago. They simply "hopped in the car and took off for Baltimore," as Ruby put it.

"We wanted it to be a secret, but the minister in Baltimore put the wedding announcement in the



POST PHOTO/GRACE R. DOVE
The Sunflower Sisters, Ruby Gary Oberst, Helen Gary Wheeler, Beatrice Gary Tolinski, Mildred Oberst Strader and Doris Oberst Roberts, recently met to catch up on the latest news at Pickett's Charge. The five women, all Shavertown natives, have been best friends for more than 70 years.

newspaper down there and Bob's brother saw it," Ruby said. "He called our families back home."

When they returned, Ruby's mother said, "Well, I hope you're satisfied," Ruby recalled.

"She was the baby - she got away with everything," Beatrice remarked.

They also got away with smoking corn silk (it was "disgusting") and Bugler tobacco out behind the shed and stealing sweet corn from the farmers.

But they didn't get away with sneaking out and trying to get back in through the kitchen window at 2 a.m., with Mother standing there waiting for them. And the police once caught Ruby standing on the street corner waiting for her sister with some hot flowers she had just picked from a neighbor's yard.

"He took them away," Ruby said.

All the girls but Doris attended Kingston Township High School. Doris went to high school in Kingston Borough.

Beatrice and Mildred were in the class of 1933 with Marguerite Catton and Marian Anthony, while

Helen graduated in 1934 with Beatrice Ray, Ruth Pritchard and Dolores and Ward Trumbower.

"Ruby and Doris always used to follow us around. Now they can't wait to get going - they're the only two left who still drive."

Beatrice Gary Tolinski
 "Sunflower Sister"

Ruby was in the 1938 graduating class with Hazel Bulford, William Dierolf and Bertha Jones.

The women's secret for keeping young is to keep active and to "refuse to become old."

Mildred takes care of her own home and garden, where she raises flowers and veggies - tomatoes, beans and zucchini.

"I have only four zucchini plants, but they produce so well that when the neighbors see me coming outside with my pail, they hurry inside so I won't give them

any more zucchini," she said laughing.

She has two daughters, two sons, 12 grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and one more on the way.

Doris owns a newspaper in Lake Hopatcong, NJ, writing the copy, selling ads, pasting it up and delivering it with her husband. They are the proud parents of three sons and a daughter and have 10 grandchildren.

Ruby, who still works "taking care of old people," has two sons, three daughters, 14 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Helen has three daughters, five grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

Beatrice has one daughter ("You slouch," quipped Ruby), and three grandchildren. Her first great-grandchild is expected soon.

They may be separated by many miles, but the five Sunflower Sisters keep in touch by letter and telephone until the next reunion.

In good times and bad, they have always been there for one another - a good reason why they're still sisters and best friends after more than 70 years.

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