

Ruth Kenney



Ruth Kenney was born in Saulnierville, a rural Acadian fishing village in Digby County, Nova Scotia. “Mom always wanted me to be a secretary or a school teacher but I knew from the time I was 10 I wanted to be a nurse, I thought it was more glamorous.” Ruth left home when she was 17 and completed her RN training at the Victoria General Hospital in 1961. Some things never change – young, bright and pretty nurses attract attention and in 1963 she met Harold who became her husband 18 months later.

In 1969 shortly after the birth of her second child Ruth was told she had ulcerative colitis and would need ileostomy surgery. “I knew about the surgery and how difficult it would be on our marriage. I cried right in his office.”

1973 Ruth started the first of a series of annual lectures at the VH hospital for second year nursing students on their role in rehabilitating ostomates.

1976 Second President, Ostomy Halifax

1978 A planner of the first Maritime Regional Ostomy Conference which attracted 200 participants from Quebec and the four Atlantic Provinces. Ruth becomes the resource person for effective pre and post-op management of the ostomate at the VG Hospital

1979 Successfully completed the ET training in Tuscon Arizona

1982 Planned and participated in the ostomy workshop at the Middleton hospital for nurses and ostomates in the valley area

1984 The first Enterostomal Therapy program was started at the VG hospital thanks to the lobbying efforts of Ostomy Halifax, and ET nurses Grace Kellock & Ruth Kenney

1986 Ruth's article on "Conventional Versus Continent Ileostomy" published in World Council of Enterostomal Therapy

1993 Ruth became the very first recipient of the United Ostomy Association Enterostomal Therapist of the Year Award. At this time there were over 200 chapters of the association worldwide.

1993 also saw Ruth awarded the City of Dartmouth volunteer of the year award.

2002 Ostomy Canada presented Ruth with the ET of the year award

Ruth has a smile and a good word for everyone. With her patients she has two other qualities - determination and concern.

“Years ago I would go daily into the room of a young fellow who had ileostomy surgery. Are you willing to learn anything today” she would ask her patient.

“Not today.” The following day the answer was “not particularly.” On the third day, knowing that the young man would be discharged soon, she asked again and got the same negative response.

“I lost it!” Ruth said “When you go home and you're up to your eyeballs in shit you will be ready!” Taken aback, this uncooperative young man said meekly “OK, I'm ready”

And she felt the same concern for each and every one of her patients, “I just would not let them go home without knowing how to empty and clean.”

Six months later this same lad appeared wrapped around the door frame of Ruth's office. “Do you remember me? I'm the fellow who gave you a hard time. You woke me up that day, thanks.”