Member Profile: Ruth Richardson

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“I’ve had a wonderful life and wonderful experiences,” says Ruth Richardson, whose passion for the Gallery goes back eight decades. Born in Rochester, Richardson grew up off St. Paul Street and graduated from Benjamin Franklin High. Her father was responsible for foreign sales at Gleason Works, which meant she had early opportunities for travel—“I spent my fourth birthday in Berlin.”

Most importantly, her parents were interested in the arts. She took piano lessons at the Eastman School of Music, studied ballet, and was a frequent visitor to the Memorial Art Gallery, where the family were long-time members. In the 1920s, Richardson enrolled at the brand-new Creative Workshop, where she remembers studying clay with “Miss Will”—director of art instruction Blanca Will—and making linoleum block print Christmas cards. “I came on Saturday mornings with my dad. He’d drop me off and go to Gleason—it was standard in those days to work Saturday morning. Then we’d have lunch at the Manhattan.”

After graduation, Richardson spent two years in New York City at the Katharine Gibbs School, then returned home and took a secretarial job at Eastman Kodak. She would remain with the company for 37 years, retiring with a staff position in 1978. For most of her career Richardson was based in Rochester, but during the war years she transferred to Kodak’s government sales office in Washington.

Intent on her career, Richardson did not marry until she was 50, and then to a cousin she had known all her life. Bill Richardson had first set eyes on his future wife when she was an infant and he was ten years old. “He was told he could look at me, but was not to touch me,” she says. Then in 1926, at the age of 18, Bill moved to Rochester from Canada, and Ruth “fell in love with him right away.” Friends through the decades, they married in 1969, after Bill’s first marriage had ended, and enjoyed 35 happy years together. Bill worked in customer service at Rochester Gas & Electric until his retirement, and the couple enjoyed traveling in the US and Canada. He died in 2004.

Throughout the years, Ruth Richardson has remained a loyal friend of MAG. While she was working at Kodak, she returned to the Creative Workshop, this time as an evening student. “Trying to draw what I saw helped me to see things better.” With her husband, Richardson joined the Gallery’s Director’s Circle in 1992, and she rarely misses an exhibition.

Most recently, she became a charter member of UR’s newly created George Eastman Circle.

“Ruth Richardson’s love for the Gallery runs long and deep,” says director Grant Holcomb. “She is a cherished friend and, along with her late husband Bill, has been a keen supporter of the Gallery’s goals and vision.”

“Ruth’s support of the Gallery is remarkable and inspirational, and her love for the Gallery is infectious,” adds Joe Carney, director of Gallery advancement, “It’s always a joy to see her.”

Editor’s note: Ruth Richardson passed away December 14, 2009.