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Betty Brooks

Photographed by Diane Stevenson

A quiet communicator

Betty, at 73, is always ready with pen and paper for a good conversation - she has throat cancer and is unable to speak. If you can read lips, the conversation flows, but if not, Betty will write for you. Undaunted by her impediment, Betty cheerfully writes "everyone always said I talked too much so this is my payback." Along with Willamette Valley Hospice staff who Betty says "are great and actually give me strength," she is fortunate to have her family nearby; she has 2 sons, 1 daughter, 8 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren all in Oregon. She and her daughter Debbie go out about every other day Betty's favorite foods.

Betty was born in Kansas and moved to Oregon with her parents and siblings at the age of 2 ½. Her parents picked fruit and the family lived in a 3-sided shack until it burned down, "we lost everything - which wasn't much." When her mom was giving birth in the hospital, the family of 7 moved into a newly cleaned and white-washed chicken coop on the farmer's property. As an adult, Betty worked as a store clerk and a telephone operator for Ma Belle. Betty believes that she has had a great life. "Everyone's life has a few ups and downs, but how lucky I am. Born on this great planet; I have had a few serious things happen, but life is super. This illness has not been too bad. There's not much pain and I can still be my ornery self." Even in her quietness, and as her illness progresses, Betty conveys a sense of merriment that infuses her guests with a glimpse of her liveliness and strength.