

= Ruth Martin (Lassie) =

Not to be confused with Ruth Martin (Neighbours) , or Ruth Martin (All My Children)

Ruth Martin is a fictional character on the long @-@ running television series Lassie (1954 ? 1973) . She was briefly played by Cloris Leachman before June Lockhart stepped into the role . The character makes her first appearance mid @-@ fourth season (1957) and her last in the first episode of the eleventh season (1964) ; she appears in 208 episodes in total .

Ruth is married to Paul Martin , an agricultural school graduate and a farmer . The couple buys a small farm and adopt Timmy , a foster child living on the farm . Ruth is portrayed as a practical , competent woman , a loving wife and mother , and an active community member .

In 1957 , Cloris Leachman joined the cast as Ruth but eventually her feuds with co @-@ stars , her unwillingness to sign a contract , and other troubles forced show producer Jack Wrather to fire her at the close of the season 's filming . June Lockhart replaced her at the top of the 1958 season and remained in the role until the cancellation of her character in the first episode of the 1964 season .

Lockhart appeared as Ruth Martin in Campbell 's Soup commercials , a feature film edited from a multi @-@ part episode of the television show , and show @-@ related merchandise such as Whitman novels and Dell comic books . The actress received an Emmy nomination for her performance in the role in 1959 .

= = Role = =

Ruth Martin is the wife of Paul Martin , a young agriculture college graduate and farmer . At the start of the series , the couple buys a small weatherbeaten farm on the outskirts of fictional Calverton from war @-@ widowed Ellen Miller . The two adopt Timmy , a foster child living on the farm ; and his companion , a rough collie called Lassie .

Throughout the series , Ruth performs housewifely chores such as cooking meals , ironing and mending , hanging laundry and baking cakes . She milks the cow , gathers eggs , drives about the county in the pickup truck , and participates in Sunday school carnivals , community square dances , and her son 's cub scout troop . When her husband is out of the county on business , Ruth manages the farm with the occasional help of neighbor Cully Wilson .

Ruth 's housekeeping is sometimes interrupted by Timmy 's adventures . She helps him rescue a child trapped in a culvert rapidly filling with flood water , assists him in his 4 @-@ H projects , pitches a tent for their overnight accommodation at a Coon Dog Race , and flies into the Canadian wilderness when Timmy and Lassie are swept away in a hot air balloon . Marital affection between Ruth and her husband is only represented through brief kisses and hugs . The role ends when Ruth and Paul emigrate to Australia where Paul will teach agriculture , leaving Lassie with neighbor Cully Wilson . Timmy was reclaimed by the County and eventually adopted by a family named McCullough and began using his middle name , Steven . Ruth and Timmy (Steven) are reunited 25 years later in the seventh episode of the first season of the syndicated television show The New Lassie , entitled " Roots " .

= = Portrayal = =

Ruth Martin portrayer June Lockhart joked with co @-@ star Hugh Reilly that she had been married to him longer than to any of her real husbands and commented after leaving the show , " In six sexless years of playing a country wife and mother , I was hardly ever allowed to kiss Hugh Reilly on the cheek . "

In a conversation with John Barron of the New York Times in 2004 , Lockhart was asked what Lassie was all about and why it remains something of a magical memory for those who were children in the 1950s and 1960s . She responded , " This was a fairy tale about people on a farm in which the dog solves all the problems in 22 minutes , in time for the last commercial . Often , if the scene had gone well , and maybe we hadn 't gotten the dialogue quite right , if the dog was right , they 'd print it . "

= = Production details = =

= = = Creation = = =

Lassie debuted September 1954 in the Sunday 7 : 00 P.M. time slot . Former Broadway star Jan Clayton portrayed Ellen Miller , a war @-@ widow living on a farm with her young son Jeff (Tommy Rettig) , and her father @-@ in @-@ law (George Cleveland) . The show was an instant hit , winning the Best Children 's program Emmy in 1955 and receiving a host of additional honors .

As the 1957 season approached , Rettig wanted to leave the show and Clayton considered returning to her roots in musical theater . Producers planned to ease their characters out of the show while introducing new ones . Six @-@ year @-@ old Jon Provost was hired to play Timmy , a foster child living on the farm . Rettig hoped the plot would be restructured to allow his departure , but producers were content with the status quo , the show was more popular than ever , and it was hoped Rettig and Clayton would reconsider .

Producers were forced to overhaul the show when actor George Cleveland died suddenly on July 17 , 1957 . The plot was revised with new characters Ruth and Paul Martin buying the Miller farm , and becoming foster parents to Timmy and Lassie . Ellen and Jeff were written out of the show .

= = = Casting = = =

= = = = Cloris Leachman = = = =

With the new storyline ready , Cloris Leachman was quickly hired to play Ruth Martin . As the season 's filming progressed , Leachman tired of playing a farm woman . She wouldn 't sign a contract , and refused to do PR for the show 's sponsor , Campbell 's Soup , telling the company , " I make my own soup . I don 't eat yours . " Audiences found Leachman and co @-@ star Jon Shepodd as Paul Martin " too stiff " . The two worked adult glances and touches such as holding hands , hugs , pecks on the lips into their on @-@ screen performances in order to give their characters more depth . Toward the end of the season , George Chandler was hired to play a grandfatherly character and to bring some warmth to the show , but Leachman was soon feuding with him ; their disagreements appeared in the gossip columns . With ratings plummeting and public resentment aroused , show owner Jack Wrather summarily fired Leachman and Shepodd in February 1958 when filming for the 1957 ? 1958 season was completed .

= = = = June Lockhart = = = =

Wanting to protect his \$ 3 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 investment , Wrather began a search at once for two new stars to fill the roles of Ruth and Paul Martin . Casting Paul involved a good deal of effort , but Hugh Reilly , a Broadway actor with a reputation for being a solid and cooperative performer , was signed . Actress June Lockhart , who had appeared in the second of MGM 's popular Lassie films (Son of Lassie) , had been considered for the role of Ruth Martin before Leachman was signed . Lockhart however was working in New York at the time and declined the role . Eight months later , she had moved back to California and was working on both coasts . Once again , she was offered the role , but , stipulating she only would be interested in a one year commitment , producers were forced to decline . Then she reconsidered :

... I thought about what I had been offered and I said to myself , " What am I being so damn grand about ? I have two children to support , the part they want me to play has a lot of dignity , the show is already on the air , I wouldn 't have to film a pilot , and they have a sponsor . This is really a great gift that has been offered me . I 'd be stupid not to at least look into it . "

Lockhart was finally hired to play Ruth Martin and debuted with Reilly in the opener of the fifth

season , " The Storm " (1958) . No explanation was offered the audience regarding the new faces on the show . In order to protect the All @-@ American perception of the show and its sponsor , Campbell 's Soup , the producers wrote long clauses into cast contracts forbidding them from appearing in anything that would damage their wholesome image .

In 1963 , the multi @-@ part episode " The Journey " was filmed in the High Sierra and later edited into a feature film called Lassie 's Great Adventure . The plot follows Timmy and Lassie as they are swept away in a carnival hot air balloon . Ruth and Paul fly into the wilderness to be at hand when Timmy is found . The episode was the only episode filmed in color during the Ruth Martin seasons . Ratings skyrocketed .

= = = Cancellation = = =

As filming for the 1964 season approached , fourteen @-@ year @-@ old Jon Provost chose not to renew his contract . Stars Lockhart and Reilly were fired . With only Provost and the producers knowing the real reason for the changes , the press was told the show had done all the " boy and his dog " stories possible , but Lockhart speculated that Provost 's mother wanted too much money. and Reilly later stated that the producers ' decision was based upon trading four advanced salaries for future star Robert Bray 's starting salary . Lockhart loved her role as " Lassie 's mother " , but accepted her fate , telling columnist Bob Thomas :

It was an actor 's dream -- steady work , excellent pay , a wonderful cast and crew , and a chance to do a good scene now and then ... Now I 'm ready to go back playing all those tramps and neurotic and alcoholic women . They 're good fun , but motherhood pays off better in the long run .

In " The Wayfarers " , the first @-@ part of the three @-@ part 1964 season opener , producers shipped Ruth and her family off to Australia where Paul would teach agriculture . Lassie was forced to remain in the States due to Australia 's strict quarantine regulations and would become the companion animal of Corey Stuart , a forestry service worker . Lockhart commented , " We were supposed to go over there so that Paul could show the Australians how to grow things . We hadn 't had a successful bean crop in six seasons . What could they possibly learn from us ? "

The actress later recalled :

Back then I didn 't realize the power of my character . I didn 't realize the image I had created and what it meant to so many people . Ruth was so underwritten , so what I was able to bring to it was what made it special to me . The looks , the affection , the pats on the head , the tone and inflection . I got to bring that to her character , and that was all I thought there was . I didn 't know what was being received on the other side of the screen .

Lockhart joked with Reilly that she had been married to him longer than to any of her real husbands and commented after leaving the show , " In six sexless years of playing a country wife and mother , I was hardly ever allowed to kiss Hugh Reilly on the cheek . "

According to one writer , " the character who really held the series and the family together was the mother " . In commenting on her Ruth Martin character , Lockhart said , " Without a doubt it was the mother who ran the farm . Mother was the strong one . She was certainly a liberated woman who didn 't take any guff off anyone . "

= = = Reprise = = =

Lockhart and Provost reprised their Lassie roles in " Roots " , the seventh episode of the syndicated television show , The New Lassie . After the episode , Ruth disappeared and was never mentioned again . In " Roots " , the viewer learns Ruth and Paul never properly adopted Timmy , and he was forced to remain in the States while his parents emigrated to Australia . Timmy was then adopted by a family called the McCulloughs .

= = Reception = =

=== Merchandising ===

Adventure Books , Golden Books , coloring books , puzzles , Halloween costumes , and other items were all manufactured around the show . Ruth Martin appeared in several Lassie Dell comic books as well as in Whitman novels , and a Whitman punch out book . Ruth Martin appeared in television ads for Campbell 's Soup .

=== Ratings ===

In its seventeen @-@ year run on CBS , Lassie placed first in its Sunday 7 : 00 p.m. EST time slot . The highest rankings in the Nielsen ratings for Lassie were the Martin family years : # 24 in 1957 , # 22 in 1958 , # 15 in 1959 , # 15 in 1961 , # 21 in 1962 , # 13 in 1963 , and # 17 in 1964 . The only year the show did not climb into the top twenty @-@ five was 1960 , when it ran opposite Walt Disney Presents on ABC and Shirley Temple Theatre on NBC . With the departure of the Martin family in the eleventh season , the show began a steady decline in ratings .

=== Nominations and honors ===

June Lockhart received a Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at 6362 Hollywood Boulevard for her television work . The actress also received a 1959 Emmy Award nomination for Best Actress in a Leading Role (Continuing Character) in a Dramatic Series for Lassie .