



DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH MILDRED ORR

by Nancy Wilstach, writer and
retired journalist, Montevallo, Alabama



Although she started her life in Nashville, Tenn., and has lived on both coasts, Mildred Orr says that she has “always thought Montevallo was home.”

Looking back at 98 years of living, she says: “I’ve been blessed . . . with both marriages and with good friends.”

Her family moved to Birmingham when she was a girl, she said, and she wound up graduating from Ramsay High School in Birmingham. One of her best friends turned out truly to be a friend for life. Corinne Loy Miller was a classmate and, later, a neighbor in Montevallo’s Arden subdivision.

Her first husband, Arthur Bolton, was a year ahead of her at Ramsay and went off to college at Auburn for a year until Uncle Sam came calling. Meanwhile, Mildred graduated from Ramsay, and Arthur wound up a Navy officer.

Oh, and they managed to get married in Miami before taking off for the West Coast.

“He wanted to be a pilot,” she said. The Navy had other plans, deciding his presence was urgently needed with the Pacific Fleet headed to the Philippines. “He later learned to fly out at the (Shelby County) airport,” she said.

After World War II ended, the couple got to spend a brief time in civilian life. Then came the Korean Conflict. Uncle Sam needed Arthur again.

This time, they were a family of three.

“Art was two years old, so he and I moved to Norfolk. And I thoroughly enjoyed the time we spent in Norfolk,” Mildred said. Arthur’s duty this time was on the admiral’s staff, she said, “and the admiral kept close to shore.”

When the Korean Conflict calmed enough that the Navy let Arthur get back to civilian life, the young family headed back to Birmingham.

“He (Arthur) didn’t want to go back to building, so he opened his own heating and plumbing business,” she said. It turned out to be a success.

After Art had become a teen and was a student at John Carroll Catholic High School, Arthur’s father had a stroke.

The family moved to Montevallo then to help with the elder Bolton’s care. They bought a house on Meadow Drive in Arden subdivision.

“I was out in the yard one day, and someone came out of the next house and called out to me,” Mildred said. “It was Corinne—right next door. She truly was a friend for life!”

Although Mildred speaks with animation and enjoyment of her more than six decades in Montevallo, her life here has included times of heartbreak and grief.

Arthur died in 1990. Art graduated from Samford University and Washington and Lee Law School and practiced law in Philadelphia until he died of cancer in 1999, at age 50. Her second husband, Dr. Milton Orr, a dentist and former Mayor of Montevallo, died in 2002.

Mildred, however, focuses on the joyful memories. “I have faith, real faith, and, you know, it gets deeper as I get older. I speak to Him often every day.”

She started going out with a family friend a year after Arthur’s death, but she didn’t regard it as a romantic relationship. Then, in 1993, Dr. Orr telephoned.

This was different, she said, smiling at the memories evoked.

When he asked her to marry him, “we had a problem—He was Methodist, and I am a Catholic!”

They solved their problem by having the (Methodist) Rev. Buddy Freeman perform their ceremony, with a subsequent blessing by a priest.

“From then on, we went to my church on Saturday night and his church on Sunday.”

Montevallo has been blessed by both: Dr. Orr donated some of the land for what has become Orr Park, and Mildred donated Ebenezer Swamp to the University of Montevallo. It is now the Ebenezer Swamp Ecological Preserve.



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