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by Mayra Flores De Marcotte



Preserving the Mueller family's story fell on the shoulders of Mary Mueller, who at 84, is the oldest member of her family. "Beyond me and behind me, there is no one," says the Almaden Valley resident.

The thought of putting together a written history of her family and ancestors had never occurred to Mueller until she received a phone call five years ago.



"My grandson Connor called me on his 18th birthday to thank me for his card and check," she says. "He then asked me what I was feeling as an 18-year-old."

The task seemed easy enough, but Mueller told him she'd get back to him with her answer. She began jotting down notes, but was unhappy with the results so she enrolled in a "How to Write a Family History" class at the

Willows Senior Center

"Connor challenged me; SeniorNet had the classes," she says.

When Mueller was 18, the year was 1942, and she was still in her hometown in Mississippi. "It was an easy year for me to remember," Mueller says. "So many dramatic things were going on."

Mueller was a freshman at Mississippi State College for Women that year. That same year she recalls that her uncle, an unlucky gambler, was murdered. Nationwide Hollywood actress and

wife of Clark Gable, Carole Lombard, was killed in a plane crash. The memory of Lombard's death is still etched in her mind.

Mueller says that many who lived in Mississippi were enamored with Hollywood. "It was just so far away from where we were," she says.



Photo at left courtesy of Mary Mueller: **Mary dances with a soldier at a USO dance at Granada Air Base**

The culmination of that year for Mueller and the rest of the country was the attack on Pearl Harbor

"My boyfriend, my future husband, was at Pearl Harbor

when it happened," she says. "He was aboard a ship taking photos when it happened."

With each memory and each photo that she found, Mueller made note of the dates and names to look them up later. Eight months after her grandson called, Mueller had put together a collection of her memories, photos and stories of when she was 18 in a 19-page booklet.

"It was a little more than what he was expecting," she says with a smile.

SeniorNet instructor John McCulloch met Mueller when she enrolled in the class. "She was intense, very focused on the class," McCulloch says. "On the eighth week, she brought in the booklet that she had put together and showed me."

McCulloch was blown away by the work Mueller had put into the story of her 18th year. "She's leaving a legacy for not only for her family but other families," he says.

"We all have our different reason for taking up genealogy," McCulloch said genealogy is like detective work, tracking ancestors down.

"You only have so much information to work with so you come at them from their kids, their spouses, military records and so on, each leading you to these resources on the web. And when you finally get a feel for this person, you know more than just their birthdate, death date and occupation," he says.



Black history: Matriarch digs up roots to tell family story
A woman is seen pointing to a document, likely a family record or genealogy chart, as part of a story about her family's history.