



The [SeniorNet Learning Center at the Willows Center](#) in San Jose, CA, has been serving older adults with innovative programs since 1994. Below, read about one of the current students who has benefitted from their computer classes.

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
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"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. "S he'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.

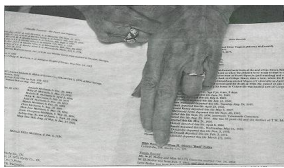


Photo by Vicki Thompson: **Mary Mueller looks through a book of Bible records that has helped her find clues in her search for her ancestors.**

After finishing her booklet, Mueller's interest in her family was piqued. "I didn't have any genealogy done up to this point, and eventually one precipitates the other, so I took another class," she says.

The more accustomed she became to working on the computer and the Internet, the more genealogy pulled her in. "I'm a real detective," she says. "I went to the computer. I knew how to attack this. One link links to another."

Mueller's den in her Almaden home has turned into the primary place where she does her detective work. Stacks of files, books and papers can be found on shelves, on the floor and in the nooks and corners of the room. "These things creep up on you," she says.

She bought a large dresser to file things away but underestimated the amount of history she'd uncover. "I feel it's valuable," Mueller says of her work. "More and more people, even younger people, are becoming interested in finding their family stories."

The last time Mueller sat down and shared family stories was two years ago at Thanksgiving. A n impromptu visit to her sister Gene Horton's in

Nashville

turned into a road trip from

Tennessee

to

Texas

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Once she was in

Texas

, her other sister and brother-in-law, Margaret and Joe Lovelace, gave the traditional turkey day a twist.

"It was wonderful," Mueller says. "Joe got us Texas barbecue brisket, and we spent the days doing nothing but going through boxes and photos."

Among the photos, dust and yellowing documents, Mueller sat cross-legged on the floor and continued her search for her family's story. "That's the only time we dug into genealogy together," she says.

She went home a few days later, a couple of boxes heavier, and began sorting through the decades and memories. These boxes have resulted in various collections of stories and records that span six generations.

For now, Mueller is ready to take off her detective hat and allow the next generation to continue her work.

This article was written by Mayra Flores De Marcotte

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Read the [interesting story of the Willows Learning Center](#) .