

# THE QUEEN OF VICTORIA DRIVE RUTH ANN SEGERSTROM

BY DYLAN ALMENDRAL

I started this article over a year ago, piecing together the story of a legend. The name Segerstrom looming over me as big as life. Growing up in Santa Ana in the 1990s and 2000s the name was everywhere and on nearly everything. And being part of the first graduating class at Segerstrom High School, and meeting both Henry and Ruth Ann, while a student there... well, let's just say we know where we are.

Very few people, at least in my young generation, live most of their lives on the street that they grew up on as a child. Even more, very few people end up living across the street from their childhood home. This was the case of Floral Park's most-beloved centenarian, the late Mrs. Ruth Ann Moriarty.

Ruth Ann was born January 18, 1922 to Anton and Nellie Segerstrom. They first lived at 1625 Spurgeon Street in Santa Ana. Anton worked

*PHOTOS: (top to bottom) Nellie Ruth, Henry, Ruth Ann and Anton Segerstrom on the farm—Anton would dress in suit and tie to drive to the farm in Costa Mesa, change into work clothes, then change back to come home; Ruth Ann Segerstrom childhood portrait; Halloween at the Russell House; family gathering at the house on Victoria Drive.*

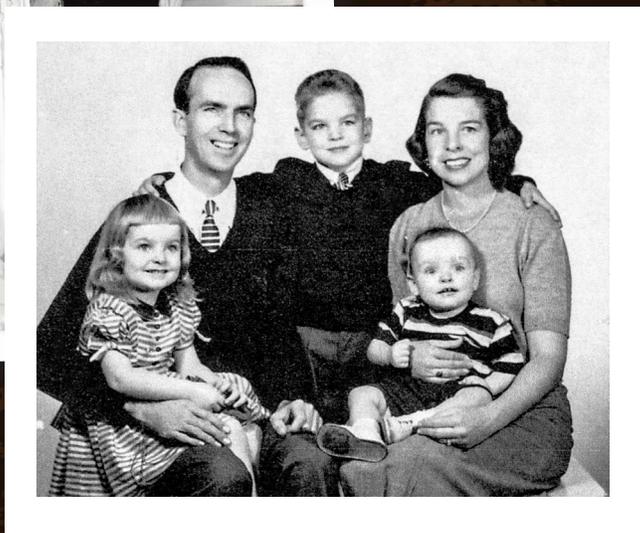


the family farm with his brothers, raising alfalfa, dairy cows and finally lima beans while Nellie minded the house and the children and volunteered in various civic groups. Ruth Ann's younger brother, Henry, followed her being born April 5th, 1923.

Ruth Ann lived a childhood many of us could only dream of, in a simpler time with more wide open spaces to explore and adventure into than we could possibly fathom. A true life of wonderment.

She saw Santa Ana and greater Orange County grow into the mini-metropolis we know and love today. And with Henry being only a year and couple months younger, a playmate was always around. In the 1930-31, Anton built the family home at 1914 Victoria Drive. Ruth Ann recalls riding her bicycle up and down the then very sparse Victoria Drive, playing games with Henry and then the Brinkerhoff family moved in across the street at 2003 Victoria, Ruth Ann and Carol were the same age and Jack Brinkerhoff was born in 1928 making him the youngest of the "Victoria Drive Gang".

In preparation for writing this, I tracked down Col. John R. Brinkerhoff (Retired) at his home in Virginia. At age 92 and after over 40 years of service, 24 of which on active duty, Jack, as he preferred to be called, was suffering from Parkinson's disease but could still regale me with stories of growing up with the Segerstroms in Santa Ana. "Us kids ran amuck in those fields and groves before all those houses were built! Ruth Ann was the shy one of the group but she kept us all in-line to make sure we didn't get into too much trouble." He told me on the first interview. "We would



*PHOTOS: Nursing portrait; With her younger brother Henry Segerstrom; Wedding portrait in 1946; family portrait: daughter Jean, husband Eugene and sons Richard and Donald. Photos courtesy of Ruth Ann Moriarty.*

play outside! Imagine that, kids used to play outside!” Carol, his older sister, had passed before I found Jack and, sadly, Jack passed away shortly there after, just before 2021.

Like most things in life, when it’s time to do-away with childish things, you lose touch with your childhood friends and everyone goes their own way. For Ruth Ann, after graduating from Santa Ana High School in 1939, that meant Scripps College in 1939-1941, followed by Stanford University 1941-1942 and University of Southern California 1942-1945. While at USC, she served in the Cadet Nurse Corps while receiving her Bachelors of Science in nursing with an emphasis on infectious diseases and her registered nurse credentials. It was here in 1945 where she met her husband Mr. Eugene H. Moriarty. He was a veteran of the Marine Corps in WWII and produced training films for the Corps. They married in 1946 and lived blissfully together for 65 years.

After their marriage they bounced around the US for a time, with Gene a student and later a lecturer at USC School of Cinematic Arts. They lived in San Francisco primarily during this



time. In 1962, the Moriartys returned to Santa Ana and purchased a home down the street from the family manse on Victoria Drive. It is here where they raised their three children, Richard, Don and Jean. (They also purchased the house next door so there would be plenty of yard space for the kids.) All three attended their parents alma mater, USC.

Ruth Ann took up the mantle from her mother as being civically involved

and philanthropic. Ruth Ann was a member of Ebell Club since 1940, starting in Jr. Ebell. An active champion of numerous charities, she was a founding member of the Women’s Auxiliary of Orange County, a board member of the Visiting Nurses Association of Orange County, a supporter of the Assistance League of Santa Ana, and a member of Ebell Society of Santa Ana. She later became a lifetime member of the Salvation Army’s Orange County Advisory Board and was honored at the nonprofit’s Spirit of Giving Awards ceremony in 1999. She served on the Humanities Board of the University of California, Irvine and was a patron of Costa Mesa’s Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

In retirement, Ruth Ann became the family historian and archivist. Saving history and memories from one of Orange County’s most influential families.

Ruth Ann was known for her generous nature, quiet, yet ostensibly regal but with a wit and mind as sharp as any. When she spoke, she spoke with purpose. She was the embodiment of class. The Queen of Victoria Drive.

Floral Park will miss you. Orange County lost its matriarch.

