

Alma Ann Arnold Clark

We are gathered this morning to bear witness to our faith in the resurrection, the resurrection of all who are buried in Jesus Christ the Lord and the resurrection of Alma Ann Arnold Clark. Ann died on Monday after a long hospitalization and an extended period of declining health. She was 79.

Ann Arnold was born in Louisburg, NC, October 6, 1930, the third child of Tom and Mary Arnold. Ann's father was a tobacco and cotton farmer, so she grew up on a family farm and lovely traditional farmhouse that remained a location and source of spiritual strength and personal attachment throughout her life. Growing up on a tobacco road farm in the depression on the younger edge of the greatest generation meant that Ann also lived through some of the great transitions of our modern world. But she stayed close to the traditional and bedrock values of family, church, and community that she received on the family farm.

When she was four and five Ann served as the school mascot at Edward Best High School, from which she later graduated in 1948. Like many North Carolina youth, she had learned her three Rs in high school – readin, 'ritin, and the road to Richmond – and moved to Richmond upon graduation to take a position with the telephone company. Through her cousins she met William Herndon Clark. They married in 1952 and moved to West Point, Virginia, when William took a job there with the paper mill. Ann was home and raised their two children.

When Bill and Ann separated in 1965 she returned to Richmond, found employment, and took on the role of supporting herself and providing for her children. After trying her hand at a number of jobs, Ann found a fulfilling position with the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. She worked there 19 years, retiring as the membership director for the association.

Ann and Virgil Mercer first met in the 1960's through a mutual friend, but it was a long time before the acquaintances came into a deeper relationship. About 13 years ago they started dating, got engaged, and became inseparable companions. Ann was welcomed into the lives of Virgil's children, and Virgil into Ann's as well. It was a good and happy match.

Ann was a resourceful person, from her childhood onward. As a young child she wanted and needed some spending money. When her father offered her an acre of land, she planted and tended and picked the cotton she grew, suffering bloody hands to enjoy the fruits of her harvest. She was always a survivor, working hard to support herself and her family.

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Ann was most social creature who enjoyed times with her family and friends. She liked to travel, starting as a child with short flights in a small plane with family friend Joe Ball. Later in her life with Virgil she enjoyed longer and more exotic trips, such as an extended South American cruise, several trips out west, and a cross country rail excursion.

Ann was devoted to her family. She and her sister Zaida were particularly close. Ann was also an animal lover. Her rat terrier Tammy competed with Virgil for her deepest affections.

Ann was raised and baptized in the Cedar Rock Baptist church of Louisburg. As an adult her spiritual life was nurtured primarily in United Methodist Churches, before joining with Virgil Bon Air Presbyterian Church in 2005.

Ann was preceded in death by her parents, Tom and Mary Arnold; and her sister, Zaida Lanier. She is survived by her longtime companion and fiancé, Virgil Mercer; brother, T.K. Arnold and his wife Sarah; son, David Clark and his wife Leigh; daughter, Donna Shater and her husband Chris; grandsons, Nathan Lester and his wife Megan and Adam Lester; great-grandson, Hoke Lester; brother-in-law, Paul Lanier; several nieces and nephews, and many longtime friends. Virgil's daughter, Joyce Mercer, will now share some additional personal words.

Having gathered for our mutual support and comfort, and to hear the witness of the Scriptures, let us worship God:

R. Charles Grant
Bon Air Presbyterian Church
Richmond, Virginia
January 8, 2010