

Candor and kindness defined Myrtle Moulton - always appreciated when she beat you at cards

Myrtle Moulton: *Island girl. Green thumb. Card shark. Friend. Born Jan. 17, 1928, in Stanhope, PEI; died Dec. 20, 2020, in Halifax, of what is believed to have been a stroke; aged 92.*

Myrtle Moulton was born Exilda Myrtle Moulton, but she loathed her first name. To nudge Myrtle into embracing her unusual moniker, her mother told her that she was named after an elegant waitress in New York. Even as a child, Myrtle wasn't buying that story. As an adult, she was more open about her disdain. "Exilda," she contended, "was no waitress." Myrtle believed she was named after a call girl, although that is not the term she used.

It was a high-school teacher who, struggling with her name, looked down in dismay at his attendance sheet, looked up at his quietly tense student and proclaimed, "We'll call you Myrtle." She loved that man.

An irreverent, yet gentle, combination of candor and kindness defined Myrtle throughout her life. After graduating from the Charlottetown Business College in 1944, she moved with her sister Gladys to Nova Scotia in search of work. They found it on an assembly line in the verdant Annapolis Valley. "You would pick up an apple and place it on the conveyor belt. Then you would pick up another apple. Then you would go out of your mind," Myrtle explained.

A move to Halifax was more rewarding. Here she met Fred Moulton on a blind date. He was a former merchant marine from Grand Bank, Nfld., who worked for the Department of National Defense. Myrtle loved his sense of humour and his inherent strength. She was not so nuts about his penchant for collecting, things and people. She often spoke of the Christmas Fred arrived home with five Spanish sailors stranded in Halifax. They didn't speak English; Fred and Myrtle didn't speak Spanish. And it didn't matter.

Fred and Myrtle would spend 53 contented years together in Halifax before his death in 2004. They had one daughter named donalee.

For 30 years, Myrtle worked as a legal secretary. In an era when most women worked at home raising children, Myrtle had her own career and earned her own paycheque. The choice – and it was a choice – wasn't something she proclaimed with placards or lauded to others, it was simply something that was right for her and her family. There was no fanfare, no self-congratulatory conversation.

She was renowned for her shorthand, a skill Myrtle never lost even in later years as she lived with vascular dementia. Her family would come home to phone messages transcribed word for word in squiggles indecipherable to either of them.

Myrtle had the amazing, and annoying, ability to ignore expert advice when it didn't suit her purposes. If she didn't think she needed a doctor-recommended vitamin, she didn't take it. She also took her time when the clock was ticking to a deadline. When a friend or family member arrived to drive her to a doctor's appointment, Myrtle would be surprised it was that late in the day. "I'll take a quick bath," she'd say, to protests there wasn't time. As she'd step into the tub, she'd yell down for someone to put the kettle on. She'd need a bite before she could leave. When she arrived, always a few minutes after the appointed hour, she'd apologize. "We had trouble finding a parking spot," she'd explain accurately, if not fully.

Myrtle became one of the top 100 bridge players in Canada and the first female Diamond Life Master in Atlantic Canada. She was a popular partner, not just because the chance of winning was strong but because Myrtle would make them feel good about their game, even if – and especially when – they made mistakes.

That is not to say Myrtle didn't take her bridge seriously. After one particularly bad night, a friend said, "Well, it doesn't matter if you win or lose as long as you had fun."

Myrtle looked at her as if she were a foreign object. "Don't be so foolish," she said. Candidly, but kindly.