

Once Upon a Time in North Park

A Local Champ

By Karon Covington

Do you know that 3984 Idaho, right here in North Park, was the home address of an individual who was three times named the United States “Woman Athlete of the Year”? She was Maureen Catherine Connolly and she lived here from her birth in 1934 until her marriage to Norman Brinker at St. Patrick’s Church on 30th Street in 1955.

By the time Maureen was 10, she had talked Wilbur Folsom, the court pro at what is now the North Park Rec Center at 4044 Idaho, into giving her free tennis lessons. At age 11, she entered a tournament for girls 12 and older, where she stunned the competition by winning every match. A local sportswriter soon nicknamed her “Little Mo” after the mighty battleship Missouri of World War II fame. In 1953, Mo became the first woman to hold four of the International Grand Slam titles in the same calendar year: Wimbledon, Australian Open, French Open, and U.S. Open. She was well on her way to repeat that record in 1954 when an equestrian accident ended her illustrious tennis career. Undaunted, she became a feature writer for the San Diego Union, which led to an interview and romance with Norman Brinker, member of the 1952 Olympic Equestrian Team. The championship court at San Diego’s Balboa Tennis Club was dedicated The Maureen Connolly Stadium in 1971. “Little Mo” a three hour documentary on the life of this extraordinary athlete was produced by NBC in 1978. Maureen died at age 34 in Dallas, Texas, where her cemetery marker reads simply: “Wife, Mother, Champion.”