

Carol Wallace Orr

Book Publisher

Class of 1951



At Needham High School Carol Wallace Orr, class of 1951, was involved in basketball, tennis, and field hockey as well as the glee club, a variety of committees, and the staff of the *Advocate*. While maintaining a B average, she reveled in extracurricular activities and remembers her high school years as packed with social crisis, political intrigues, academic challenges, evolving friendships, good times and a good deal of hell-raising. In an attempt to refocus her energy from mischief to constructive activities, NHS principal William Pollard entered her in a United Way public speaking competition. She won for Norfolk County.

Outside of school Orr wrote a weekly column about NHS for the *Needham Chronicle*, actively participated in the Unitarian Church youth group (serving one year as president), and campaigned for the elections of State Senator Leslie B. Cutler and State Representative Harold Putnam. Nicknaming her "Senator," her classmates supported her political interests by electing her NHS representative to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Youth in Government Day.

Although feminism was unheard of in the 1950's, Orr, who would become an activist in the women's movement, credits her NHS experience with giving her the confidence for career success. She remembers many of her teachers as role models, particularly biology teacher, Alice "Gatesy" Gates, an independent woman whose warm-hearted wisdom guided Orr through crises in high school and afterwards.

Orr attended Boston University for three semesters, then left to marry and raise children. In the 1960's, when it was still rare for wives and mothers to attend college, she became one of the first "re-entry women" and graduated from Douglass College, Rutgers Uni-

versity, having been elected to Phi Beta Kappa, the national honor society. With her B.A. degree, she then went job hunting and, in her words, was fortunate enough to land an entry-level position at Princeton University Press, a publisher of scholarly books. Although she had been offered another job as an advertising copywriter which paid more than the \$5,000 Princeton offered, she knew when she set foot in Princeton University Press that she had found her career. For twelve years she rose through the ranks: permissions manager, paperback editor, reprint editor, assistant to the associate director and editor, executive assistant to the director, and finally assistant director. Her experience at Princeton having provided her a rare opportunity to learn publishing from some of the best professionals in the business, in 1978 she accepted the directorship of the University of Tennessee Press.

During her career, Orr was actively involved in the larger world of scholarly publishing, working to increase its professionalism and productivity. In addition she pioneered in the movement to improve the status of women in this, her chosen field. She was a co-founder and first president of Women in Scholarly Publishing a national organization devoted to the education and professional advancement of women and minorities. Her leadership was recognized by her fellow press directors when she became the first woman president of the fifty-year old Association of American University Presses. She served as secretary-general of the International Association of Scholarly Publishers. In 1987 Orr was awarded the Women's National Book Association's Book Women Award for her "accomplishments and contributions to the book world that have earned the respect of her colleagues and have made a difference in bringing authors and their readers together."

Since retiring from the University of Tennessee Press in 1991, Orr has remained semi-active as a free-lance editor, but her primary interest now, in addition to traveling, is encouraging people to be healthy and active as they age. She has become a certified aerobics instructor, specializing in exercise for seniors.