

Spotlight on Marian George



Where did you grow up?

I was born in Windber, Pennsylvania, which was a coal-mining town back then. My mother, Helen Walerysiak, was from a Polish family of 13 children. I am named for one of my mother's sisters who died at a young age. My father, Emil George, was one of four brothers born in Beirut, Lebanon who moved to Windber. My mother and Father married after his return from WWII.

We moved to St. Petersburg, Fl. when I was two where I lived until graduating with a B.A. in Sociology from the University of South Florida in 1969. I was the first in my family to do so. I grew up eating home cooked Polish and Lebanese food my mother made from scratch. But, I can still remember the wonderful smell of my maternal grandmother's home made noodles in her chicken noodle soup.

We, my brother, sister and I, grew up barefoot, except for school, exploring far and wide when old Florida was full of nature, wild and free. The beach is still listed as a top beach. We would pray for hurricanes so we could body surf in the Gulf, until one came. But, that's another story.

Who is your role model and why?

My mother. There aren't enough words. She was the epitome of a humble, bright, beautiful, talented, kind, generous person. She made all of our clothes, worked two jobs, cooked, and scraped to find money for my music and dance lessons which paid off later. My mother always found time to volunteer, whether it was Meals on Wheels or helping an elderly neighbor with her insulin shots. Although she was pulled out of school before graduating high school to work on the family farm, as my mother, she excelled at work and became head of the hospital laboratory office of the Bayfront Hospital. She was my best friend and I miss her more each day.

What do you like to do in your leisure time?

I play tennis, swim, play guitar, sail, photography, and read (primarily non-fiction). A great book I just finished is "Dinner With Churchill". Others are "Travels with Myself and Another. A Memoir" by Martha Gellhorn, a pioneering war reporter who was married to Hemmingway, and "Seeds of Hope" by Jane Goodall.

How did you choose your career and/or volunteer path?

Purely by chance. I started working in a cytology lab run by my mother's boss when I was 13 and thought about a medical career. But organic chemistry and I did not agree with each other. After graduating with a B.A in Sociology, I had my traveling papers to be a Peace Corp volunteer community organizer in El Salvador.

Then I interviewed with a non-profit private school for handicapped children and adults in Crystal River, Fl and became their first social caseworker. This job evolved into fundraising, parent counseling and many other activities. As a result, I was sent to a training workshop for kids with multiple disabilities taught by Peabody staff from the Kennedy Center. There I was offered a summer internship at the Kennedy Center in Nashville, Tn. The day I was leaving to return to Crystal River, I was offered a Master's fellowship that someone had just turned down. I helped write and worked in many grant research programs at the Kennedy Center while getting my Master's and subsequently my Ph.D. I met and worked with many wonderful professors and innovators at Peabody.

Since Peabody did not hire their own graduates, I opened an office on Music Row and formed MJG Enterprises, a human resource and organizational consulting company. We provided efficiency and training services to major national and international corporations from hospitals to telecom companies.

Then, I formed Reel Productions, Inc. I refer you to the website reelproductions.com for an overview of our projects.

What's something you wish everyone knew about you?

I asked a group of older lady friends how they would answer this and one of them yelled "I'm not telling!" and we all laughed. What's great about this is that my friend's answer astonished everyone because she has Alzheimers and even her daughter was shocked that her mother was clearly listening to our conversation and that question prompted her great response. Thank you for asking it.

How did you come to join the Vanderbilt Woman's Club?

One of the tennis players, Joyce Gore invited me and put me on the mailing list for which I am very grateful.

What's one thing you like the most about the VWC and do you have any suggestions for our Club?

I like the mix of people from all walks of life. Even though I don't know many members and in fact, sometimes none of the members at some events, I have always felt welcome.

Perhaps there might be interest in a music club, where members can explore free or inexpensive music outings, like the Steinway concerts. or the Jazz and Blues Society, W. O. Smith Music School, Blair music concerts, Music City Baroque, etc. Another thought is that since the world is becoming digitized, i.e., photographs, family memories and histories are not being recorded and saved in a tangible way which can be preserved and shared with our loved ones. Is there an interest in Memoir writing and illustrated family histories? There are people who could conduct some group "how to" sessions resulting in something tangible to pass on and share. Just a thought.