An Uneventful Life?

A Friend’s Personality

By Gordon Eriksen

When Marilyn Gosling was called, and asked if she would consent to an interview as a subject of a Gatherings profile, she was willing, but commented that she didn’t “match” the typical Friends’ personality. She then asserted that she has led an “uneventful life.” I don’t agree. You can be the judge.

Marilyn Anderson was born and raised in Ishpeming, Michigan, which she described as a friendly, cultured, happy place to grow up. The name is Chippewa for “high place,” and the area was originally a mining community with a population of varied ethnic backgrounds including Polish, German, Cornish, Italian, Scandinavian, Welsh, and Finnish, which made it “multicultural” long before that was vogue. As something of a portent, she then followed with two years in the mining town of Marquette, Michigan, which she described as a friendly, cultured, happy place to grow up.

Marilyn Gosling, the judge.

When Marilyn completed high school, she was attracted first and spent her freshman year at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. At the time, it seemed a likely location for a girl from a small community in the Upper Peninsula. However, the bustling capital city of Minnesota, even when focused within a small liberal arts school, didn’t keep her attention and she transferred to The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and earned her B.A. with a double major in history and science/mathematics—a rather unusual combination. While attending Michigan, she also met David Gosling, and they were married in her senior year. After graduation, Marilyn and David settled on the Gosling homestead in White Pigeon where they raised two sons: Christopher, who is a successful chemical engineer, and Bruce, an equally successful accountant.

When the two boys were old enough to have their days filled with school activities, Marilyn could no longer restrain her own ambitions and she headed north to Kalamazoo to pursue a career in librarianship. She obtained her Master of Science in Librarianship from the accredited graduate program at Western Michigan University in 1966. That degree gave her immediate employment first in the Sturgis, Michigan, public schools, which she then followed with two years in the Sturgis Public Library. Ever enthusiastic and wanting more of a challenge, she was given a splendid opportunity when the position as director of the Glen Oaks Community College, in Centerville, was advertised. Her application was reviewed, she was interviewed, and offered the position which she held for the succeeding twenty-four years. During that period, she was instrumental in building a fledgling (and inadequate) college collection to a resource of considerable quality and diversity.

Do the preceding experiences describe an “uneventful life”? Neither will what follows.

Librarians, regardless of stereotypical images, have, by definition, wide-ranging, often eclectic interests. Marilyn is no exception. Art is one of her passions. Like many of us, she responds to the immediacy and the vibrant colors of the Impressionists, but she is also especially fond of the whimsy of Claes Oldenburg. She has been a Museum Associate of the Art Institute of Chicago for many years, and visits the museum and city frequently. As she says, “You pop down to South Bend, catch the electric train, and you’re in downtown Chicago in an hour.” Not limited geographically to that fine cultural resource, she is equally at home in the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis which has an exceptional collection of contemporary art—and a large collection of Oldenburgs. She also takes a number of trips with the Kalamazoo Art League, and the Kalamazoo Institute of Art—thereby further enhancing her artistic exploration.

No reader will be surprised to hear that Marilyn has also “spread her net” into the world of music. Here the lure of the modern has not captured her heart and she is most devoted to early classical music, notably Baroque, and especially the work of J.S. Bach. Any glance at the supporters of the area’s major music organizations will find her name among the donors as, for example, the Society for Old Music and the Bach Festival Society associated with Kalamazoo College—and there are few concerts at which she is not among the members of the audience.

Elderhostels have also caught Marilyn’s fancy. She has attended five, so far, in such diverse locations as St. Paul; Marquette, Michigan; Richland Center, Wisconsin; Philadelphia; and St. Mary’s in South Bend. The subjects are diverse and intriguing, including among them the history of the Marquette area in northern Michigan, the Book of Job, the contemporary music of Gershwin and Cole Porter, humor, and even forensic anthropology.

One can not describe the “unexciting” life of Marilyn without discovering she is an avid reader of mystery and detective novels which, in case you didn’t know, have several subdivisions. Ms. Gosling takes on the category of “malice domestic” with a further focus on the “cozy” mystery. Cozy mysteries have little or no violence; the crime is committed early (typically without lurid detail), and is usually solved by a “thinking” amateur detective. Such novels often conclude without a mindless, impossible chase up one street and down another—although danger does lurk in strange places. Probably the exemplar of this type of mystery is found in the gentle ways of Agatha Christie’s Miss Jane Marple, a delightful, deductive detective who is the model of malice domestic style.

But, as a devotee of mysteries, Marilyn does not simply “read” them. For anyone who follows the international world of mysteries, there is, inevitably, an organization to join, and a conference to attend—each according to his or her special category. Marilyn attends the conference of the Malice Domestic fans originally held yearly in Bethesda, Maryland. Each year, the members of the conference recognize the best mystery novel, and other selected publications, in their genre. The honored writers receive the “Agatha Award”: a small teapot with a skull on its side! (The organization’s motto is “not everyone’s cup of tea.”) This conference has grown so large, over a thousand attend, that it must now be held in one of the large, downtown hotels in Washington, DC.

As if no other events might occur, Marilyn has one or two other interests. One is as an officer, Membership Secretary, of the St. Joseph County Chapter of the Michigan Association of Retired Persons. Another is her long association with the WMU library Friends that dates to its formation in the early 1990s. She has been active in organizing the book sales, attending the meetings, has served on the Board, and is now Vice-President.

So, let’s hear it for those who lead uneventful lives!