

REMEMBERING MARIAN DIAMOND

By Anne Rosenzweig

Here are some of my personal reminiscences about Marian Diamond.



I met Marian Diamond in the early 60's when she was a colleague of my dad, Mark Rosenzweig (left in photo), at UC Berkeley. They and psychologist David Krech and biochemist Ed Bennett (on the right) were the team that “proved” neuroplasticity at a time when the conventional wisdom was that the brain does not change with experience.

To me as a teenager, Marian always seemed larger than life. She had a thousand-watt smile and a magnetic personality that oozed charm. She dressed impeccably, had an amazing collection of colorful scarves to coordinate with her stylish outfits, which were usually in bright colors, and spoke eloquently with great confidence.

We would ski at Alpine Meadows with the Diamond and Bennett families in the late 60s and early 70s. Marian would always wear the latest style of skiwear. My mom wore the same pair of plain navy blue ski pants year after year. Millie Bennett, a research scientist, and Life Member of the Sierra Club, wore multi-pocketed khaki pants, making her look as though she were about to leave for a snow camping adventure. All three women had PhDs, but they could not have looked more different on the ski slopes!

After I graduated from college, I lost touch with Marian when the research team my dad was in broke up after David Krech died in 1977. Dad and Ed Bennett continued working together, but Marian left to pursue other projects.

Marian was a very popular professor at Cal. When my friend Hilary Naylor learned of Marian's death through my Facebook post, she commented that Marian had been her favorite professor at UC and that she had always hoped that Marian would someday receive the Nobel prize in medicine. Sadly that is no longer possible, as the Nobels are not awarded posthumously.

The last time I saw Marian was in April of 2016 at the International House Gala. I was there because my mom had volunteered at I House for decades. After Mom's death in 2008, my siblings and I established a scholarship in her memory that is awarded each year to a francophone student. (My mother was French.)

Marian was being honored at the gala, both for being a distinguished UC Berkeley professor and as an alumna of I House. Marian had lived at I House in the late 40s. She met her first husband Dick Diamond there. They were both American residents, living among many foreign students. They met on the tennis court, as both were avid tennis players. Dick was a physicist at Lawrence Livermore Lab. After they married, they had four children, who were all younger than I.

After Marian died in July 2017, I attended a private memorial for her at St. Paul Towers, the senior residence near Lake Merritt, where she and her second husband Professor Arnold Scheibel lived the last six years of their lives. He predeceased her by just three months. Her family shared several stories about her, two of which were new to me:

About 20 years ago, Marian visited Cambodia. She was so disturbed at the primitive conditions in an orphanage she visited, that she took it upon herself to raise funds to establish a school for the children. She returned to Cambodia many times to check on the progress of her pet project. Her younger son Jeff accompanied her on one of these trips. He was struck by the obvious affection the children and staff had for her.

Marian always sought adventure. One year she and some friends climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro. They did not plan to summit, but made it to base camp. A large climbing party, which had intended to summit, had to interrupt their climb because of a terrible storm. They took shelter in the same base camp where Marian and her party were staying. The larger stranded party of about 60 climbers was led by none other than Jimmy Carter! Reportedly Marian and Jimmy Carter hit it off and had an animated conversation about the brain!

(The official UC Berkeley memorial service will be held at the Faculty Club on Saturday, January 20, 2018.)



Marian Diamond was fortunate to discover her passion for the brain when she was a teenager. She lived her life with great enthusiasm and flair. Marian showed that it is possible to be a world renowned scientist, who also delights in being a woman: wearing stylish clothes, bright lipstick, and flashing a million dollar smile. I feel privileged to have known her.