

*This is the third in a series of interviews with Morgan Hill's charter members. The Branch will celebrate 35 years in December 2016.*

## **Marianne Thornton: Charter Member**

Marianne Thornton was interviewed by Carol O'Hare and Carol Holzgrafe at her home on Willow Springs Road on December 7, 2015 (the date of the 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Morgan Hill Branch), where she has lived since 1965.



Marianne December 2015

About her AAUW membership, Marianne says, "I still think that my first reason for joining is the most important: educating women and girls. I feel that that's what we do. "

### **Background and Family**

Marianne's early life was remarkably unusual. She was born in Hong Kong into a time loaded with uncertainty, November 1938. Her parents were living in Canton (China) when they heard that the Japanese were about to capture the city. Although they had already planned to go to Hong Kong for the birth of their child, this news sped up their departure. They caught the last launch out of Canton at 8 a.m. on the morning of the bombing; the Japanese occupied the city by 4 p.m. Marianne was born two weeks later.

"I could have been a British citizen," she says.

Marianne's mother had gone to Canton after college to teach English in a Chinese girls' school. She met Marianne's father in China. He was from Germany and was in the import/export business.

When Marianne was three months old, the family returned to Canton and then moved to Kunming, China. When the Japanese began bombing that city, Marianne and her mother were sent to Hanoi, Indochina, "where life would be safer." Her father followed later.

The family spent about five years in Hanoi. "During the war and at the end, Hanoi was a very unpleasant place to live. The people were poor and the food was scarce and expensive. The city was frequently bombed, and when an air raid sounded, we went to the trenches."

When the war was over and it was possible to leave, Marianne, now age 7, and her mother flew to Shanghai in a military C-47 aircraft with baggage and live animals tied down the center of the fuselage, while passengers sat on canvas seats that lined both sides the length of the interior.

“We took a cargo ship with 12 passengers from Shanghai to San Francisco. I recall that they were required to look for mines during part of the journey. My father could not join us in the U.S. due to his German nationality.

“After two weeks aboard ship, I remember going under the Golden Gate Bridge. A tiny tugboat came out to the ship in the dark, bringing a letter from my mother’s cousin, a Naval officer stationed in San Francisco. He and his wife met us as the boat docked, and that evening we embarked by train to South Pasadena where my mother’s parents lived, and that became our home.

“After my father arrived a year later, we all lived with my grandparents until I went to college.”

Marianne’s grandfather had been a medical missionary in Cameroon, West Africa. Her grandmother joined him and they were married in 1898. They remained for 40 years before returning to the U.S. (Her grandmother had been one of the early female graduates of the University of Michigan.)

## **Education**

“In 1957 I went to the University of Washington in Seattle and lived with my aunt and uncle for two years. I studied home economics with a science minor and received my B.S. degree in 1961.

“I met [husband] Tim at school. He followed me out of class one day. He was from West Seattle. We were married in July 1961 in Seattle [instead of South Pasadena] because my father-in-law couldn’t travel.”

## **Morgan Hill**

The newlywed Thorntons drove to Morgan Hill for their honeymoon, carrying all of their belongings in their Volkswagen. The weather upon their arrival was 107 degrees, and Marianne thought Morgan Hill was a “hell hole.”

Tim had majored in physical education and science. He had been hired to teach and to develop a competitive swimming program at Live Oak High School. He became director of the Morgan Hill Learn-to-Swim program and started the MH Swim Club.

“Shirley and Don Lantz were the first people we met in town, and we became lifelong friends. She was the current director of the swimming program, though there was no pool at Live Oak HS [then located where Britton is now]. The Live Oak pool had not yet been completed, so the programs were run at Oak Dell Park and Uvas Meadows [now Thousand Trails campground].”

Tim taught English and physical education until 1967 when he opened Branham High School in San Jose and began another aquatics program.

Marianne substitute taught in the schools, then worked at P. A. Walsh teaching physical education and social studies. She then taught Home Economics in Gilroy for 4 or 5 years.

“Joan Sullivan and I met when I was subbing at PA Walsh in 1961. We’re still good friends and plan to travel together this summer.”

Marianne quit teaching in the schools after she had children (Kimberley born 1966 and Skylar in 1969), but she did private sewing instruction with knits in people’s homes, as well as teaching adult education classes.

Summers were spent at Tahoe Meadows where Tim worked for several years. “We took our boat up for the summer, closing up the house in Morgan Hill.”

Tim retired from teaching and coaching in 1985 and went into real estate, spending about 15 years in the business. He also helped found the Morgan Hill Masters Swim Club.

In the meantime, Marianne involved herself in art, jewelry-making in particular.

“I always liked doing things with my hands,” she said. She loved working with silver, gold and brass. Later she worked 14 years for Joe Escobar, Diamonds, retiring in 2002. “I did quality control and sold jewelry,” she said.



Marianne 1999

The Thorntons have a cabin near Shelton, Washington, that belonged to Tim’s family. It is on Puget Sound and dates from the 1930s. They gave it a much needed update – originally it had no plumbing. Now they spend three months a year there – still working on the house. Their children and grandchildren enjoy the cabin, too.

## AAUW Morgan Hill

Marianne doesn't recall seeing the notice of an AAUW planning meeting in the local paper back in 1981. "I probably heard about it talking to people we knew," she said.

"I thought the purpose of it was good, to educate young girls and women. Also, Morgan Hill was a very small town in 1981, and this was a great way to meet new friends.



"We really had good times together because the branch was small. The social life was a wonderful part of it." Her favorite interest groups were bicycling and Gourmet.

Marianne 1989

(The Morgan Hill Learn-to-Swim program was also an excellent place to meet friends. They knew Mike Parks before he was married to Karen.)

Although Marianne never served on the AAUW board, she immediately got involved with the Wildflower Run when it started in 1984. "All of us had the opportunity to fill many positions," she said. "I was in charge of medals and trophies. Husbands and children helped in the early days. We hauled signs, set up water stops and the course. We timed with stopwatches. The run has grown into something really neat; I love involving everyone."

Marianne was responsible for Wildflower Run donation/sponsors for years. She still serves on the sponsor committee and brings in several major donors, such as Honda and George Chiala Farms.

### Current Activities

Today Marianne and Tim swim everyday at the Aquatics Center. She likes deepwater aerobics best.

She is active in the Peninsula Wearable Art Guild, serving as assistant membership chair, even though she no longer has time to make jewelry, what with four grandchildren nearby.

The Thorntons have traveled to many countries: South Africa; East Africa, Ecuador, Galapagos, Costa Rica, Greece, Australia, Cook Islands, Hong Kong,

China, and most of Europe, as well as many motor home trips to Baja. This year they will add Peru and Machu Picchu.



Wildflower Run 2006

### **The Importance of AAUW**

“The organization has a good purpose, it is a good cause, and there are a lot of great women. I’m glad that the funds we collect go 100% toward our purpose: education for women and girls.”

Carol O’Hare and Carol Holzgrafe