

To think outside the box (and touch the human soul)

It all began spring break of 1977. I was 17 and a junior in high school. My sister Shauna Wolff Res-ton was attending Marymount College as a speech and drama major ('78) and asked me to join her that week.

So this small-town, sheltered girl boarded a train (first time) from Trinidad, Colo., (where our family lived) to Newton, Kan. What I hadn't realized was that she was consumed with her role in the theater department's production of "Peter Pan."

What a fun, exhilarating week it was for me. I learned how to strike sets between acts, adjust lighting and help the students with their lines. Everyone was extremely nice, and it was a memorable time.

Fast-forward to 1979. I was attending a university in San Diego and was not happy. The concrete, fast-paced jungle of Southern California wasn't me. My heart was small town and the big city was a lonely place.

My sister, by then Admissions Counselor at Marymount, encouraged me to transfer schools. So I did.

Marymount. I smile. Oh yes, my time at Marymount. How do I articulate what Marymount meant to me as in community?

My "hall" mates in the Administration Building and our late night philosophical discussions, or those times when we'd procrastinate on writing a paper by walking the cemetery; spending a weekend at the Manna House of Prayer in Concordia on a directed retreat; Sister Virginia Pearl, who always had a twinkle in her eye as she encouraged us to think outside the "Old Testament box;" Sister Catherine Michaud, my advisor, who lovingly challenged and gently directed my young, restless, eager, questioning mind; and Dr. John Palan, who made me fall in love with philosophy. Yes. Philosophy. Descartes: "I think, there for I am!" I can't tell you how many times in my life this saying

Alumni UPDATE

MIRIAM WOLFF- McCORMICK CLASS OF '82

Miriam Wolff-McCormick lives in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with her husband Peter and two English Cocker Spaniels. She is a mental health therapist who focuses on women's and children's mental health and multicultural issues. Peter is deputy director general for the International Water Management Institute, a nonprofit, scientific research organization focusing on the sustainable use of water and land resources in developing countries.



FROM LEFT: Son Sean, Miriam, daughter Maki and husband Peter. Christmas 2014 in Glasgow, Scotland.

has gone through my head!

Marymount. It not only taught me to be a creative intellect — to think outside the box — but to be an educator and an activist.

Since leaving Marymount in 1982, I went on to enhance my elementary education background with bachelor's and master's degrees in social work, with a focus on International Health. I married a man from Scotland, in Scotland, and have two children; one biological and one adopted from Ethiopia.

I have lived on three continents and resided in six countries: Canada, Indonesia, Eritrea, Jordan, India and Sri Lanka.

Marymount and my extensive travels challenged me to step outside my "security box," to value my past life experiences, mindsets and attitudes but not be attached to them, to learn and view the world from a different perspective, to celebrate diversity: unfiltered, unbiased. But this challenge was never easy.

I saw individuals cheating starvation by feeding on the bark of the palm tree, children dying of tapeworms due to the mistrust of modern medicine

and its cure, innocent civilians caught in the crossfire of geopolitical conflict, land and a people scared by wars.

I felt overwhelmed witnessing human inequality and suffering. At times I questioned the sanity of our world, and questioned my role in it and how I could make a difference.

It was in these questioning times that Sister Virginia's wisdom came to mind: "Trust God. Take care of what is needed in front of you. All else will come."

I did and, so it did. I have been confronted many times with the challenge of creating something from very little!

This was the case in southern Sumba, Indonesia, where a co-worker and I were to give a health and hygiene presentation to local village women. With no electricity, I used a large flashlight

and improvised.

My astonished colleague asked, "How did you come up with that idea?"

I told her that while at Marymount during my teacher education training, our instructor handed each one of us three items, to improvise as teaching tools. My three were a flashlight, packing paper and playing cards.

Knowing how shadow puppets work, I designed a projector. I used the packing paper to illustrate the lessons I projected with the flashlight while the playing cards became flash cards for mental math. The lesson: Think outside the box!

Before leaving Marymount, Sister Catherine Michaud gave me a card with a quote from Carl Jung: "Learn your techniques well and be prepared to let them go when you touch the human soul."

This quote was, for me, the heart of Marymount. It has traveled the world with me. It has been my meditation, my reflection and a reminder of the depths of my faith and our connection to humanity.

This is Marymount's gift to me.

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records, contact Jennifer Rein, director of Alumni Relations, at jennifer.rein@kwu.edu or 785/827-5541, ext. 1129.