

# RANCHO SANTA FE

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# Connector

Cover photo by Felice Kinnear

Healing Through Language,  
Theatre, Art and Music:

*How Compassion  
Saves Lives*



Best Version Media

A private magazine serving the residents of the Rancho Santa Fe area

## RESIDENT FEATURE

Healing Through Language,  
Theatre, Art and Music:

# How Compassion Saves Lives

PHOTOS AND ARTICLE BY FELICE KINNEAR

**T**he Life and Legacy of Rancho Santa Fe Pioneer Dr. Marianne McDonald

"When I look inside and see that I am nothing, that's wisdom.  
When I look outside and see that I am everything, that's love.  
And between these two, my life turns."

-Guru Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Dr. Marianne McDonald, a professor of classics and theatre arts at UCSD has lived an action-packed life from the moment she could walk. Her glamour, gladiator strength and innovative spirit are unmistakable. She speaks 8 languages, her work has been published over 250 times, she is an accomplished harpist and has a black belt in karate.

Marianne founded the McDonald Center in 1981, leaving an imprint on many lives for the better and was awarded Philanthropist of the Year in 1985 by AFP (San Diego's Association of Fundraising Professionals). In some respects, her life is reminiscent of a real life Greek tragedy and like a true survivor, she has transformed her experiences into new strength for building a stronger community.

Marianne's story began on January 2, 1937, in Chicago, Illinois where she was born at Henrotin Hospital. Her father, Eugene Francis, was from Syracuse and later moved to Chicago where he founded and headed Zenith Radio and served as a US Navy Commander in WWII. Her mother, Inez Riddle, originally from Oklahoma, was an accomplished composer and concert pianist, with several of her works performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Marianne spent her formative years on her father's yacht, *The Mizpah*, while her father cruised the Caribbean. They then moved to Florida and Evanston, Illinois before residing at the top of a prestigious Lakeshore Drive building, where Maria Shriver lived below with her parents.

Marianne began school at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Chicago,

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Marianne and Bridget with handcrafted harp.

where the nuns nurtured her interest in education and sparked her love for literature. "I wanted to become a nun, until I found boys," she joked. After studying there for eight years, she finished her secondary education at the Chicago Latin School.

In 1958, she became a 'liberated woman' and began an impressive quest for knowledge beginning with a B.A. in Classics and Music, a degree devoted to the study of the literature, history, philosophy, language and archaeology of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. She then graduated from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania.

In 1960, she obtained a M.A. in Classics from the University of Chicago. In 1975, she received her Ph.D. in Classics at the University of California at Irvine. Becoming enamored with Greek culture, she continued her studies even after she was married and started a family.

Marianne is very proud of her six beautiful children: Eugene, James, Bryan, Bridget, Kirstie and Hiroshi. Instilling in her children an appreciation for music at an early age, Marianne commissioned Lyon and Healy to build a harp for her daughter Bridget who was just eight years old. This enchanting harp covered in pure gold leaf inlay took 6 years to complete by hand. It was shipped to her Rancho Santa Fe home where a love for music blossomed throughout the household.

Her daughter, Bridget, is president of the Women's International Center 501 c3, which honors the accomplishments of women locally and internationally.





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Inheriting Marianne's eloquence, she is also fluent in French, is a committed environmentalist and has a Ph.D. from the Humanities Center at Johns Hopkins University. She writes and produces exquisite music through her own company, Bionic Sisters Productions, and is currently recording an instrumental album specifically meant for healing both herself and others. "It's something that can't be quantified, I just go with my gut when composing," she said.

Marianne's son, Bryan, is a senior product design manager at Apple. "He can outwork anyone," she said proudly. He is also a former national champion windsurfer and member of the collegiate sailing hall of fame. Son, Hiroshi, plays the violin and is a well-known sculptor and fine artist who has worked with the Guggenheim Museum in Berlin and has exhibited art in the US, Japan, Germany and Greece. Her son, James, surfs locally and is a bee conservationist instrumental in passing a law in Encinitas keeping herbicides out of the city.

Daughter, Kirstie, was a poet, fine artist, cellist, actress and fluent in Japanese. Unfortunately, she sailed into troubled waters and tragedy struck. Her life was cut short from a drug-influenced death, ghosting the footsteps of Marianne's own brother Stormy, who died at just age 23. These experiences had a profound effect on Marianne and compelled her to seek definitive answers in hopes of preventing the same thing from happening to those pivoted towards a similar fate.

In 1981, Marianne founded the first chemical dependency rehabilitation unit at Scripps Memorial Hospital to provide help for anyone struggling with alcoholism and chemical dependency. "The McDonald Center treats these destructive diseases by literally loving people back to life," she said. "It is totally rewarding for my soul and heart."



Dr. Liz Mackenzie, Dr. Larkin Hoyt, and Chaplain Heidi Johnston in front of Marianne's plaque at the McDonald Center



Marianne with a resemblance to Scarlett O'Hara

Marianne has dedicated a large portion of her life to the cause of behavioral health and later partnered with Sharp Healthcare. Sharp is the largest healthcare provider in San Diego and gives access to chemical dependency/alcoholism treatment programs for anyone battling addiction.

"Because of the many alcoholics and drug addicts in my life, I felt there had to be a better way," she insisted. In the United States alone, over three million teenagers aged 14 to 17 struggle with chemical dependency and for decades Sharp has been spearheading behavioral wellness in San Diego to help rectify the issue.

In 2007, she also supported the Arts for Healing Program (AHP) which was developed by Chaplain Heidi Johnston to help patients at the Sharp McDonald Center recover. This program brings art and music therapists into hospital rooms and engages patients in a diverse range of creative activities to help addicts toward a successful recovery.

Liz Mackenzie, the AHP Coordinator, has found the transformation in patients to be empowering and she observed an increase in the clients' motivation "to change while lessening the shame of addiction".

Marianne's significant contribution has had a lasting effect, especially for Dr. Larkin Hoyt, Director of the McDonald Center: "Marianne's support has opened the door for our 325 outpatients a day to find the help they need and we have had 99% positive surveys from our patients so far."

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Marianne regularly has people reach out to her about their transformative experiences at the McDonald Center saying: "Thank you for saving my life!"

Many Rancho Santa Fe members of the community have been touched by Marianne's generosity and wisdom. She has lived in The Covenant for over 50 years and adores this community for many reasons: "I've learned how many good and generous people live here in The Ranch. I also love the space and wildlife in Rancho Santa Fe," she said.

Marianne loves teaching her students, her children and looking after her rescue animals. "My most memorable pet is Genghis Khan," she said fondly. "He never gave up. Everyone returned him to the Helen Woodward Center within 24 hours because he was too hyper. He and I were



Marianne at a book signing event as the author for adoring readers.



The mother-daughter duo, Marianne and Bridget dressed for success.



Marianne with her beloved rescue dog from Helen Woodward, "Bling on the beach."

comparable in many ways, not all flattering! He chewed through a chain link fence and I had to get him titanium teeth to replace the ones he destroyed -- inspiring his nickname: 'Bling on the Beach.'"

Currently, while caring for her animals and maintaining her beautiful ocean view estate in The Covenant, she spends quality time practicing meditation on her balcony. "Meditation turns you into a power machine," she said. "I practice Buddhism and feel it is important to be in the moment and aware. I asked the Dalai Lama recently what he advised for us all now and he replied with one word: 'Compassion. With others and with yourself.'"

With remarkable Irish humor and valiant courage, Marianne is firmly dedicated to being a part of the return to health of so many people. Of all her phenomenal accomplishments, what impacted

me the most were her final words of wisdom. As our interview neared an end, she gave me a Himalayan salt inhaler (after one mention of allergies), a meditation apparatus and Martin Scorsese's *The Last Waltz*. As she parted with the treasures she said with a wink, "These will revolutionize your life."

Her gesture and story is a testament to her tremendous intellect and gumption distilled from her impressive education and a lesson in overcoming tragedy. She took hardship as a cue to improve the quality of life for so many, as well as push for a brighter future in our community. The imprint of her work and heart will remain long lasting in Rancho Santa Fe and San Diego, especially for those in need at the McDonald Center and for our furry friends at the Helen Woodward Animal Center.

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