



Eulogy for Marion Corron

As given by Greg Corron in Boise on Sept. 30, 2017

I would like to tell you about my life with Marion and what made her the unique person who we loved, and whose loss we feel deeply.

Marion was born to Scottish parents. Her mother had training in music, and was the daughter of a farmer landowner. She had a degree from the Royal Academy of Music in Scotland, and taught piano. Her father was a successful inventor and an engineer who worked in the oil industry. He pioneered new ways of getting oil out of the ground, and was mostly a self-taught man, finishing his formal education when he became an apprentice engineer in his teens. Shortly after they married, they moved from Scotland to Burma, where the company he worked for was developing oil fields. The family name was Brown, and Marion Mary Stobo Brown was born in Burma in 1936. Her earliest memories were of her nanny, a young native woman from a Baptist mission.

The family moved to Edinburgh, Scotland for a year, then back to Burma, until 1942, when the Japanese army invaded in order to capture the oil fields. The workers and their families had to escape, starting their journey by truck and then and by train. They had a narrow escape when the rail station was destroyed in an air-raid right after their train left. Had the train been delayed, the escape would have ended then and there. But the train brought them safely to an airstrip, where they boarded a plane to take them to India. Marion's father had to stay behind and blow up the oil wells and power station so they could not be used by the enemy. Then he had to hike out of Burma while avoiding the enemy troops. After crossing India by train, he was reunited with his family in Bombay. They lived in India for the next two years. As a little girl, Marion picked up bits of the Hindustani language. She knew that "Jeldi, Jeldi" meant "hurry up", and "pinnika panni" meant cold water. She could recite nursery rhymes in that language too.

These early experiences and travels left an impression on her, so that she always had a fascination with foreign lands, languages, and adventures. In 1944 there was unrest against the British in India with the rise of Ghandi and so the family set sail for Scotland, their ship travelling with battleship escort because WWII was still going on. They came through the Suez canal and across the Mediterranean sea, and when they arrived, they had no permanent home. They stayed with Marion's father's family for a while, then lived on their mother's family's estate, named Cathpair, where Marion's grandfather managed his farm. After another two years in Scotland, the family moved to Surrey on the outskirts of London. Marion went to boarding school for a year at age 10, and in postwar England, food was rationed. She recalls being so hungry at boarding school that she would secretly eat toothpaste. Waking up in the morning in winter, the glass of water next to her bed would have ice in it – there was no central heat there. Thankfully, conditions improved the next year when she went to a local school. Holidays were usually spent at Cathpair, or with other relatives in Scotland. Those times were certainly the happiest of her childhood. At Cathpair, she could roam the grounds, adopt a pet lamb from her grandfather, watch the border

colliers at work, spend time with old books in the library or explore music at the piano. She and her sister would dance on the billiard table upstairs when no one else was around. Cathpair was always an enchanted place in her memory.

In England, she studied piano and took ballet lessons, and at the age of 14 she won a junior scholarship at the Royal College of Music in London. So every Saturday she took the train to school from the house in Surrey, carrying her viola with her, and studying music theory or doing her sight-singing exercises in the train compartment. But by the standards of that time, she wasn't considered a serious student of music – her teachers were not overly impressed, and no one predicted a future in music for her.

When she was 16, the family emigrated to America, arriving in New York and seeing the Statue of Liberty. They toured the city and sampled the new American style food. She tasted her first milkshake and hamburger. Then they took the train to their new home in Longview, Texas, where she had to endure the puzzling thing called high school. She didn't understand why they were required to do such simple things as writing book reports instead of essays, or why so many tests were True/False or multiple choice. She failed her first tests, because she thought they must be trick questions. Then the teacher explained to her that the tests were not designed to be hard. Her first impression of her fellow students was that they were all acting in a play, because they were dressed so colorfully, compared to British custom, and the girls wore makeup. She thought the game of football was ridiculous, but she quickly learned to keep that opinion to herself. Texas is of course in the Bible Belt, so she soon had her first experience with knowing Jesus through a Pentecostal friend. Her parents, raised strict Presbyterian in Scotland, but not so religious after that, didn't know what to make of this new influence.

Texas had a rich musical culture, and still does. She met fellow Texan Van Cliburn before he became famous. She and her sister, while still in high school, went to a recital of his in Marshall Texas, and went backstage afterward to meet him. Van Cliburn was from nearby Kilgore. Marion always wanted to go backstage after a recital to introduce herself and compliment the performer.

After she finished high school, her father, being a practical man, thought she should go off to secretarial school and enter the work field. But she and her mother prevailed, so she enrolled at North Texas State University in Denton as a music major. She studied with Stefan Bardas, a pupil of Schnabel. Mr. Bardas had such ability that he could play all 32 Beethoven Sonatas in a series of recitals over a few months. He gave her a solid foundation in Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Rachmaninoff, and contemporary composers. His teaching lineage traced through Franz Liszt to Beethoven. Marion earned her Bachelor's degree with honors in piano and viola.

She married a man she met in college, the late William Kopecky, also a musician, a fine trombone player, who was a school band director and played in professional bands. Together they had two children, daughter Moira and son Joe. They lived in Holliday, and then Goliad, Texas. Marion taught lessons part-time, ballet as well as piano. Then they moved to Tucson, Arizona, where a good

friend Carol Brubaker, a violinist, helped them to get established. The two of them would play recitals together, and Carol taught violin to Moira, who some years later had a professional symphony career. It was in Tucson that Marion suddenly realized that teaching was in her future, so she bought her first grand piano and soon had a full schedule of students. She enrolled in the Masters program at the University of Arizona and studied piano with Ozan Marsh, who excelled in virtuoso technique. He would occasionally break strings with his powerful playing. I saw him do it at least once. I sometimes ran into Marion at his recitals. I remember well sitting in the same row as she, two or three seats away, with her writing comments and questions on the program and passing them down for all of us sitting together to read. Afterward, the group would meet at a coffeehouse where we would have at least a solid hour of “post-mortems” as she called them – inspired discussions on piano playing, composers and their works.

Her first marriage ended in divorce. It was 38 years ago that Marion and I were married. She was against the proposal at first, but I persisted because she had intelligence, culture, beauty, imagination, ability, and could talk about ideas. She was interested in people and their traits – for instance, she learned to analyze handwriting. She could tell a lot about a person’s character from that as well as from her intuition. She could “read” people. She had an unconventional mind, always asking unusual questions no one else had thought of, and noticing things that everyone else overlooked.

This is the person I fell in love with. The realization happened in an hour, while we were hundreds of miles apart. We knew each other only through music. But suddenly I realized she was the one for me. It was evening, and I had been sitting outside at twilight, watching the stars come out. I went inside, packed a bag, got into my car, and drove all night to see her. Strangely, I didn’t even know where to find her, or what would happen next, but something inside me just said “Go now.” No phone call, just go. The following afternoon, I met her, just as I opened the door to the college music building, and invited her to dinner. After dinner, I told her I loved her, and why. This sudden revelation caught her totally off-balance and had quite an emotional effect. So we talked over coffee, both of us needing to understand where this would go. Were we to simply follow our hearts? It would take more time, so we embraced, there were tears, and then I left, driving home the next day. That was the beginning of our love.

In our early years together, we would stay up for hours talking about the arts or philosophy, or why the world was so different from the way it ought to be. Despite the difference in our ages, her mind was just as full of the possibilities, idealism, and imagination of youth as my mind was. We both were avid science-fiction readers. I would read aloud to her my favorite short stories. I needed her to be my audience. I aspired then to be a writer. I was exploring photography too, so I had her pose for my camera. She didn’t have much patience for staying in one place very long, so I had to work fast to get the shots I wanted.

She had confidence that was always matched with action. Once when she went job hunting when students were scarce, she got 3 good job offers on her first day out. She did technical work to make ends meet, and once worked at an

employment agency, calling up employers and convincing them to create new jobs to fill.

She always loved plants. She studied them, knew all their Latin names, and where they would grow. She loved the outdoors, and whenever possible she would open the house windows to smell the fresh air. She was vibrant, and full of life. She was *athletic*, trained in ballet, ran on the track team in high school, and was a member of a tennis club. She led a healthy and active life. This, despite having recurring pain from a stomach ulcer, which often kept her up half the night. But she never let it discourage her. They finally discovered a cure for ulcers about 20 years ago, so for the first time in her adult life she knew what it felt like to live without that pain.

God was merciful to her. And God answered her prayers. She didn't ask for much, but whenever she needed a new student, she prayed and immediately, the next day, the phone would ring and the request was granted. We lost count of how many times that happened. It became a part of her faith. Although she joined Bible study groups, she did not find the answers to many of her questions. Both of us were looking for outside answers, but instead found a realization that God can be counted on for everything. There was the need for forgiveness, to be at peace with past regrets. She asked for and received the divine grace she needed to face life anew with strength, serenity, and confidence. Whatever the theology is behind that grace, I could see it working in her.

She had a sense of adventure. She did some serious rock climbing in Colorado with her best friend. She loved reading and studying about distant places. She knew all about the challenges of ascending Everest, the routes, the camps, all of that. She read accounts of expeditions of *all* kinds. She read history – Gibbon's history of the Roman Empire, for example. She loved *maps*, spending hours poring over them. She and her first husband liked to compete in sport car rallies – she was his navigator. She made sense of the course map and ran the stopwatch – you had to cross the right checkpoints at the right time.

Piano performance is an adventure unto itself. After we were married, she gave a full solo recital in 1981, once in Tucson and then in Flagstaff. The program was absolutely daunting technically – two virtuoso pieces by Liszt, the Beethoven Emperor concerto, Ravel's Scarbo, plus several selections by Rachmaninoff, Chopin, and Scarlatti. We will be hearing a recording from this recital later in the video tribute. She played other recitals before that one, *and* after, both as soloist and with other musicians.

She played with world-class musicians at the Flagstaff Summer Music Festival. She had a trio – clarinet, soprano, and piano, that did some performances supported by a grant. She accompanied many singers at the University of Arizona – she was very much in demand. When she performed, she had a focus and intensity that was unshakable.

She provided essential foundations and inspiration to many students who would go on to have successful careers in music. She taught Eric Ruple in the 1970's. Eric went on to become professor and head of the piano department at James

Madison University in Virginia, and has played solo recitals at the Kennedy Center. He gave a recital just a few days ago, and dedicated it to her, his former teacher and inspiration. One she never knew about, but who came forward and left a note on her legacy page, was Orhan Memed, who she taught in the early 1980's. He is now a recording artist, pianist and harpsichordist, and music scholar who lives in Rome. His recordings include the Goldberg Variations, and the Six Partitas of Bach. More recently, Daniel Seyfried, who studied with Marion in the 2000's, completed his PhD in piano. His dissertation was on the works of Claude Debussy, and he has recorded many of those works. He is now on the faculty at St. Mary's Music Academy in North Carolina.

She has had students play with professional symphony orchestras. One, Karen Cheng, made her debut at age 16, playing the Prokofiev 3rd Piano Concerto under conductor JoAnn Falletta in the 1980's. We lost track of Karen after she moved back to be with her family in Taiwan.

A few years after we were married, she got interested in the Suzuki method of teaching. Its ability development philosophy, that says that any child can acquire musical ability if taught and nurtured properly, appealed to her. She never believed that ability depended largely on inborn talent. We traveled to California for her to take a workshop from the Suzuki trainer Madame Kata-Oka, and she began to incorporate what she learned there. She taught beginners for the first time – the ability development of littlest ones was now interesting and enjoyable to her. I was surprised at first – for someone so accomplished to reach back so far – but her enthusiasm was genuine.

She loved driving out of town with me to explore some of the nearby mountains and landscape, old ghost towns and little country stores. She read Mother Earth News, and she was fascinated with alternative ways of living where there is more of a connection to earth and nature. As Emerson said, "All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better." So in 1990, we gave up our suburban lifestyle and moved to the country, putting a down payment on 40 acres and an old mobile home to get us started. That was our experiment – doing things on our own terms, having far horizons and being pioneers of a sort. Both of us put all our energy into that. She drove to town and taught students for 3 days a week, while I hooked up our water system, or fenced out the open range cows with barbed wire, or built our house, or earned money writing software. I still remember waiting to hear her car coming down the long dirt road to our place at 9 o'clock, so we could have dinner and the rest of the week together. It was a life of spending our energy and loving it, but we also had time to explore our new surroundings.

Her daughter Moira and her family moved out near to us, and Marion enjoyed being close to her three granddaughters, the youngest, Jacquelyn, being born during that time. Marion was very involved in their growing up years. She helped feed and groom their horses. She worked on quilts with them, invented things for them to do, took them to the nearby creek and had picnics there. She passed along everything she knew about plants and gardening. She shared with them painting and crafts, guitar-playing, and of course piano. Moira is with us here today, and so is Jacquelyn, who came all the way from England.

After another seven years, the experiment in country living had played itself out. The sense of adventure was gone. Our house was built, we were well-established, but we were tired of the Arizona heat and dust, and the hours spent on the road to get anywhere, and we looked north for a likely place to live. We decided on Boise. Within a month of our decision to move, our place was sold, the moving van packed, and we were on our way here. No job prospects, but I shared her sense of confidence, so within two weeks I was working at my new software job. We had just an old upright at that time, but that was soon traded in toward a new grand piano, and she began to find students and make connections among music teachers here.

What followed was nearly 20 years of teaching, along with her hobbies, which included weaving, spinning wool, knitting, lace making, and quilting. She loved yarn of all types, including alpaca, mohair, and even yak fiber. She was always giving away her creations as presents. She got seriously into watercolors, went to art workshops, and collected some fine paintings and prints from local artists. She had an eye for artistic beauty of all varieties. She also got involved in pottery making and made some very fine examples of that art. I see these reminders of her every day: for example, the quilt I sleep under, and her watercolors hanging in various rooms of the house.

She served as president of two local music organizations, and did volunteer work for them. She got to know all our neighbors. And throughout our marriage, we always had time for each other. I still liked to read to her, either poetry, the New Testament, or a book I was working on. We always had our scrabble game every evening. It was non-competitive, though. We didn't hide our letters from each other, and coached each other on winning strategies, even though we really didn't care who won.

She was my mentor when I decided to start teaching a few years ago. Through her, I learned to appreciate and to love children. I would watch her, or listen from the kitchen while cooking dinner, to the way she would engage their interest and trust. It was magic to me, not just teaching music, but the whole process of cultivating young minds.

She had a way of lifting the spirits of everyone around her. She could be quite tough on students at times, but she was never down on them. She could help them to meet challenges in a positive, energetic way.

Marion's music teaching and performing continued throughout her life. Her most recent recital, with cellist Bill Wharton, was just last year. She was still teaching through this July, even after she discovered she had lung cancer and had to use oxygen. She carried on with her usual good spirit. She didn't see any reason to give up a moment earlier than necessary. I relied on that spirit of hers, in the days after she had passed away to keep me going.

One of our earliest discussions we had when we first fell in love was, do you live by your head or your heart? Important question when you are deciding your future together. I can remember that conversation clearly as if it were yesterday. Our best conversations were while driving on long stretches of road, and this

one happened as we drove from Sedona, Arizona up to Flagstaff. I argued for the heart; she took the opposite side in our discussion. We stopped along the scenic byway to pick up a hitchhiker, a sandal-footed, long-haired young man wearing beads and carrying a puppy. We interrupted our little debate to enjoy his company.

We always felt that that afternoon had some kind of literary significance, as if we were characters in a play. An example of life imitating art. So now the new player enters, the hitchhiker sitting in the back seat, tranquil, unconcerned about his lack of transportation, depending on the kindness of others, representing a third option in our discussion that we hadn't considered, which is the spirit. The spirit doesn't seem to lead or guide us, because it is concerned with the present moment, and doesn't explain what it is doing and how it will impact the future. We don't "own" our spirit like we think we do our head or our heart. It is a gift of God. It is spontaneous and has a way of changing everything. John's gospel says the Spirit gives Life. The *heart* is emotionally invested – it wants to receive and absorb life. The *head* wants to analyze or control life. The *spirit*, though, is where life emanates from – it is the source of goodness, joy, and love, and the other fruits of the spirit Paul listed for us in Galatians. It has no needs for itself. It seeks to distribute itself wherever it may be needed, according to its own wisdom, without direction. It sometimes goes against "sensible" thinking. We can't understand the spirit like we do the thinking head or the feeling heart.

The hitchhiker was dressed perfectly for his role. He even resembled Jesus, or at least how we picture him, and he carried with him a puppy, representing innocence and the promise of new life. And he just happened to appear in the middle of our scene as we discussed the future and how we would make it happen. We assumed that we would make it happen, in one way or another. In later years, we would both recall that scene as a significant memory. You could say it was prophetic, because throughout our lives together, as we tried to navigate with the head and the heart into a new future, circumstances intervened many times to guide us back to the present where the spirit needs to be. So being an influence in the lives of the young remained at the center of her life.

Many of you have told me that something special was going on through Marion's spirit. Not only as a teacher, but as a neighbor, as a mother or grandmother, colleague, or friend. We enjoyed her spirit while she was here with us, and now we remember her with gratitude and fondness. She will be greatly missed in this life by all who knew her.

We are about to hear music by one of Marion's favorite composers, Maurice Ravel. He wrote a set of pieces based on classic fairy tales, and this is one of them. The piece is called "The Enchanted Garden" and it is about the awakening of Sleeping Beauty. This story is a reflection of the Christian belief that those who have lived by the Spirit of Jesus and have fallen asleep to this life, will awaken to a new glorious life. The ending to this music captures that feeling.