

IWCF New Member Profile Joan Cloonan

The Path IS Crooked seems to be a common theme for the personal and professional lives of so many women like Joan. In high school they succeed in so many subjects but upon graduation, should they attend college, they were faced with three choices: teacher, nurse, and secretary. Of course, a fourth option was early marriage and starting a family.

For Joan, she had parents who strongly supported advanced education for their children. Her mother had an eighth-grade education and her father, a high school education. Always a stellar student, Joan's parents wanted her to further her education. As Joan says, "both my mother and my father believed in me and made me believe that I could do whatever I set my mind to."



She began by attending LeMoyne College, a Jesuit school, obtaining a bachelor's of science in chemistry. Earning a fellowship to attend Cornell, she worked to obtain her Ph.D. in inorganic chemistry. At Cornell she met her first husband who was also working towards his Ph.D. in chemistry. Often, they were applying for the same jobs. Joan found no organizations were interested in her until they knew where her husband was going to be employed. He finished before Joan and accepted a job as a professor at Florida State. When Joan joined him in Tallahassee, she was unemployable by the university due to nepotism rules. So of course, Joan did what any unemployable chemistry Ph.D. would do, she worked for two years as a post-doctoral fellow in solid state physics.

After this stint, overeducated for almost everything, she again turned to education, and she became one of eleven women in a class of 208 students attending law school at Florida State. The combination of her law degree with a thorough scientific background became the basis for the entirety of her professional life. And what a professional life she has enjoyed.

In 1975, she and her first husband divorced. She also joined the Department of Justice in its pollution control section. This was a time when the nation's environmental laws were just being passed by Congress. The EPA was still in its infancy. As Joan said, "rivers were so polluted, they were catching on fire in Ohio." As the first woman in her department at the DOJ, she was

involved in establishing guidelines and finding ways to solve environmental problems.

During her time at DOJ, Joan met her second husband, Bill Reetz, a builder of sailboats and a brilliant inventor. When Joan accepted a position with General Electric in Ohio, Bill found a position with Trus Joist which eventually led them to Boise where she has lived since 1982.

Joan's achievements, both professionally and on a volunteer basis, are too numerous to cover in this profile. Let's just say she was, and is, a legend and a trailblazer. She's worked for General Electric, Simplot Corporation where she finished her career as Vice President, Environment and Regulatory Affairs, been a partner in a law firm, been a founding partner in a few small technological companies... As previously stated, the list is long, the accomplishments many, and the challenges were ones she always relished.

When asked, reflecting on her life so far, what gave her the greatest satisfaction, she listed three among the many reflected in her resume:

- Working with the refugees and being a founding member of Artisans for Hope
- A 42-year marriage
- Working at Simplot and with the Idaho legislature

In the 1980s, Boise became a refugee resettlement community. Fast forward to late 2000s...Joan had been working with refugees teaching them to knit and helping sell their merchandise. For the refugees, knitting is a comfort craft—portable and can be done in their spare moments. She became acquainted with Hildegard Ayer who also was teaching the refugees how to sew. Both were working with groups, often meeting in churches or backrooms of businesses. Through a colleague of Joan's who generously offered up part of his leased space that was not being used, they had a space where they could meet, store their goods, and most importantly achieve what is now the mission of Artisans for Hope, allow the refugees to connect, learn, create, and earn. A 501C3 since 2009, many members of IWCF are currently volunteers at Artisans for Hope. Probably most members of IWCF have seen their merchandise and purchased some of their high quality products.

As for her 42-year marriage, sadly Bill Reetz died two years ago. Joan served as his caretaker during the final months of his life. She misses him terribly and finds the loss was amplified by the isolation imposed on her by Covid.

During her time at Simplot, Joan had many opportunities to work with farmers, ranchers, and plant managers on using environmentally safe practices. This frequently involved developing a variety of environmental safety measures. She also had the opportunity to be involved with the Idaho Legislature on environmental legislation. She's still doing this kind of work as a private citizen, having served in numerous capacities. This is the path she took so many years ago when the law and science converged.

Joan is currently undergoing another major transition. She has moved into Revel Eagle, an adult living community. Already she is teaching knitting classes, providing spinning demonstrations, and is on a residence committee.

Though she is new to IWCF, she is no stranger to the world of philanthropy. She has been involved in several organizations benefitting from IWCF grants. Now she is on the giving end, and as Joan said, "IWCF is an intelligent way to contribute."

Welcome to IWCF Joan!