

IWCF Membership Profile - Marilyn Borup Sword

We have all heard or read about algorithms and the controversy about how they are being used. Marilyn Sword is using a T-Care algorithm to benefit caregivers. When we consider that 70% of caregivers, whether they are caring for a parent, a disabled child, or a spouse, are working fulltime, we know she's using computer science to make life easier for her clients.



More later about Marilyn and algorithms. First, let's go back to her early life and how that life progressed to her becoming a nationally recognized consultant on disability and aging issues. As she said, this was not a planned path but one that evolved over time.

A life-long resident of Boise, she attended Borah High School. Upon graduation, she went briefly to BJC (a junior college then), worked, married and had her first child, Grover Mark Loening. Just short of eight years of marriage, her husband, a mountain pilot and air racer, was killed in an airplane crash. When her son started school, Marilyn returned to college at Boise State University. As a non-traditional student, she earned her degree in Political Science as she was interested in policy issues. While in school, she was running a small farm (the area now known as Pier Pointe in S.E. Boise).

Marilyn remarried in 1979. Her now-husband of forty-two years had been a friend of Marilyn's and her first husband for years. He would come to the farm to help her with the work, and as she says, "He came and he didn't leave. We were friends." Together they have a son, Scott, who was born in 1982. When Scott graduated from Timberline High School, Marilyn graduated from Boise State with a Master of Public Administration.

Throughout being a single parent, running a farm, attending school, marrying again and having another child, Marilyn's career in government progressed. As she says, it was not planned. She'd developed an interest in mental health through the urging of her first mother-in-law, and she has spent a lifetime wandering through mental health, developmental disabilities, and aging issues with lots of support from her various bosses and colleagues.

One story Marilyn recounts is her fifteen minutes of fame when she was interviewed on ABC's Nightline news show in 1981 regarding opposition to Idaho's passing of legislation restricting an insanity plea defense. This came after John Hinckley, Jr.'s attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan. This was a big issue in Idaho. As a political activist, she was involved in the unsuccessful effort to oppose the legislation.

Her resume is long and her accomplishments are many. Rather than recap each of these, here's a quick summary (for over forty years, she has served the citizens of Idaho in one role or another): she has worked for the State of Idaho; written and administered grants; and run for the Idaho Senate. Even in retirement, she continues to serve.

As promised, back to the algorithms and the present. Marilyn is working with the Center for the Study of Aging at Boise State University and the Idaho Caregiver Alliance and its Navigator Pilot Project. She says this keeps her brain active. Project staff work with caregivers and use algorithms to match benefits with the needs of the caregiver. As one caregiver said, "You're asking about me? Nobody ever asks about me." After an extensive interview, the navigators, using T-Care results, work with the caregiver to build a plan of 3-5 goals and provide a warm hand off to resources for the caregiver. The aim of the project is to maintain the health and resilience of the caregiver. During the second year of this project, they capitalized on their bi-lingual navigators to increase outreach into the Hispanic communities of southwest Idaho. They've found that by using Spanish radio, markets, festivals and schools, they can serve a demographic that may be not reached through traditional means. IWCF member Mary Holden is the in-take navigator for this project and Susan Mauk provides support for the navigators.

Though Marilyn is retired (like so many retirees, she's still working hard on issues and passions in which she believes.) Marilyn feels very lucky to be enjoying travel, golf, quilting, gardening, yoga, and reading. When asked her greatest achievement, she instantly replied her children and grandchildren. "Grandkids are the best!" and she spends as much time as possible with them.

Welcome to IWCF, Marilyn.