

From CMC Archives at the UNCA Library

Sprinza Weizenblatt

by Stuart English

When we hike with CMC, we never know who we will meet. In a link to a file at the Ramsey Library at UNCA that Rocko Smucker, our recent club Historian, sent me are various pictures of Sprinza hiking with CMC as far back as the 1940s.

Sprinza Weizenblatt (1895-1987) was born in what is now Rumania in the province of Bukovina in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. She and her family fled to Vienna, Austria before World War I in order to escape persecution.

Sprinza raised prize-winning orchids, which she said reminded her of a bird's eye. She knew the Latin names of many flowers and had a love of nature, which she accredited to her father, a forester in the Carpathian Mountains.

It was at the Vienna Eye Clinic that Sprinza Weizenblatt's connection to Asheville began. There, she met Dr. Harry Briggs, an Asheville ophthalmologist who was studying in Vienna for the winter. He persuaded the brilliant young Dr. Weizenblatt to come to Asheville to work as his associate for \$100.00 per month.



It did not take her long to establish an overwhelmingly large practice in the treatment of eye diseases. There are many who are indebted to Dr. Weizenblatt for the preservation or restoration of their eyesight. But the needs of the unfortunate in the community laid heavily upon her and she was soon involved in establishing care for indigents, as well as opening an eye clinic that eventually became the Memorial Mission Eye Service.

Sprinza Weizenblatt's generosity, both professional and personal, took nearly every form. She found ways to serve the poor with good medical attention; she established scholarships to enable good students to receive a good education; she created a "Garden for the Blind" so that those who had lost their sight might enjoy part of the world that she loved.

This was from an article about the dedication of the Weizenblatt Health Center in 1987, two years after her death.

Sprinza, just 4 feet 11 inches, was true to her name, Esperanza, which is from Latin, meaning "to hope". She was direct, Germanic and professional with her patients, with a decidedly impish side. She was determined to learn something new every day. Dr. Anne Sagberg, an Asheville psychiatrist, remembered the first time she saw Sprinza, in 1956 at the age of 60. She was walking around the Chuck Wagon (Good Grub

Restaurant and Appalachian Motel in Blowing Rock, NC) swimming pool on her hands. Sprinza took up surfing at the age of 70, and backpacked through Alaska carrying a 50-pound knapsack and pitching her own tent while in her 80s. She sent her great niece a postcard saying that Alaska was wonderful, but she was having a little difficulty with the tent!

This is why club history (or history in general) fascinates me. There are many stories like this in the archives in the Carolina Mountain Club room at the Ramsey Library. Hopefully our members will become aware of what they are part of and check it out themselves. This is more than Meet Up. This is Western North Carolina History.

http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/weizenblatt_sprinza/default_weizenblatt.html