

Meet Marilyn McClanahan – Soprano 1



Tell us about your childhood.

Hi, my name is Marilyn.

Here I am, born in the pursuit of happy times. I was raised as an only child to the best parents that could ever be.



My folks owned several grocery stores in southeast Nebraska for 35 years. My dad worked for one year in a grocery store before he created his own grocery store out of a shoe cobbler's shop.

My dad's parents were farmers. They had four boys and two girls. Grandad played the fiddle and Grandma chorded on the piano. They played for dances in barns on a flatbed rig. The boys sang beautiful harmony in a quartet and the two girls sang solo.

All the family would congregate at our grandparents' house on Sundays. After chicken dinner they created music all afternoon. The boys played guitars, mandolin, and saxophone. I taught myself to play Grandma's pedal organ.

On my maternal side, my Czech great-grandpa played the tuba in a band.

When I was a sophomore our homeroom teacher gave us the assignment of writing a paper with the three possible vocations that we aspired to become involved in.

The first one was that I wanted to be an opera singer.

✓ - done - 15 years of singing in opera choruses.



The second was to be a teacher.

✓ - done - taught music K-12, private piano/voice students, and 12 years teaching first grade.

Third was to be a fashion designer. I didn't get that one fulfilled. I guess that is why I collect all these clothes and create outfits.

What song brings back childhood memories?

The song "You'll Never Walk Alone" brings back childhood memories. A choir of intermediate school kids was created in our Methodist church in the '50s. The song was our famous number. We wore red robes and would process from the back of the hall to the front singing the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty." We did programs around the community of southeast Nebraska. This included corners of four states.



Marilyn - 2nd Row, 5th from the Left

The robes were hauled in a U-Haul trailer behind a wood-paneled van. We were on TV in Omaha before some of us had a TV. I was in a girl quartet

that performed on that TV show. Our famous number was “Mr. Sandman.” This was the beginning of my passion for singing.

Did you play any musical instruments or sing in school?

My parents got me an old upright piano when I was in about the 3rd grade. Daddy drove me to a farm where I took lessons from a spinster with about 16 cats. This was no ordinary teacher. She taught me tap dancing, poetry, coloring with colored pencils, and introduced me to “The National Geographic” and “Reader’s Digest,” and making fudge. Never underestimate the powerful influence of a teacher.

I took up clarinet and played in the marching band.

We had a girls’ trio that got out of classes in high school to sing at funerals. When I was 14. I sang a solo at a funeral for a baby.



I attended college at a liberal arts school in Hastings, Nebraska. The instructors there were graduates of Eastman School of Music. The music history teacher lived with Albert Schweitzer, who was an authority on J.S. Bach, and he all but adopted her. This is where I soloed with the Touring Choir.

What started your interest in music and singing?

The middle school Methodist Church Choir sparked my passion for singing. I was their main soloist.

Promotional Picture College Graduation

This is a picture of me singing my college voice recital.

In 1975 I did a recital using my own harpsichord. My favorite piece was Schubert's "Shepherd on the Rock" with clarinet. Perhaps you've heard the expression of singing up a storm. That actually happened the next day. The tornado damaged our Methodist church and was on the path to my house. My studio was in the basement. I had two piano students there, so I put them under the stairwell. My daughter was 7, and I put her and the miniature Yorkshire in the dryer. Luckily, after the damage to my church, it didn't go any further.



When did you become involved with the WVC?

Ken was the music director of our Methodist choir that I was in when he took over as director of the West Valley Chorale. I told him since he was the director I might join. He told me I would have to tone down that big voice of mine. I joined shortly after.

What's the most satisfying thing about singing with WVC?

The most satisfying thing about singing with West Valley Chorale is the opportunity to sing the masterworks that require more challenging vocal expertise. I've always said that making music with your friends is one of the most gratifying experiences. The association with these members has been remarkable.

Who is your favorite composer(s), and why?

*Puccini is probably my favorite composer because the aria I sang the most often and best was “Vissi d’arte” from **Tosca**. I have been in many of his operas including; **La Boheme, Madame Butterfly, Tosca, Turandot, Manon Lescaut, Suor Angelica**. I also sang in Verde’s **Aida**. I sang in several different productions of some of these operas.*

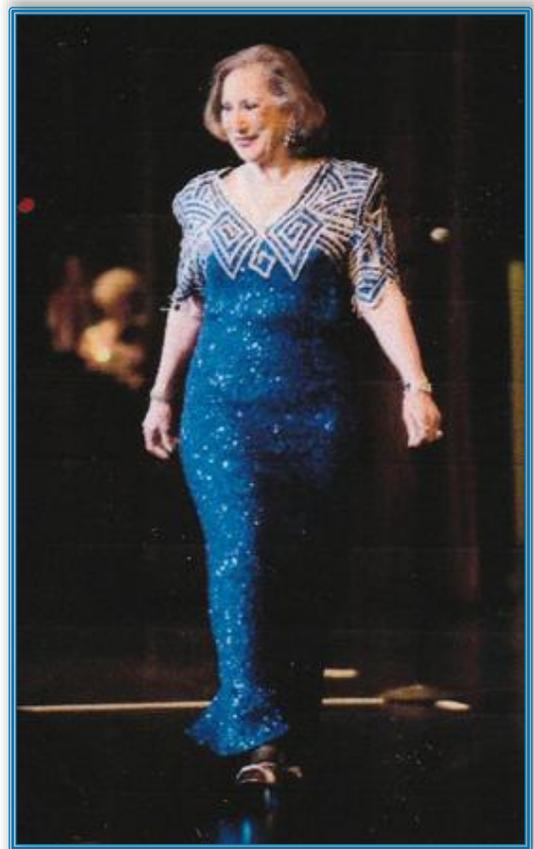
I sang in the opera chorus in Opera Omaha from 1975 – 1980, then from 1982 – 1992 in the Arizona Opera Chorus. The Arizona Opera originated in Tucson, so for many years we would do blocking rehearsals in the costume building there and then would alternate performance dates with Phoenix. It required a lot of Tucson trips and overnight weekends. Not easy!

Do you have a hobby?

I don’t think I have any hobbies. My life centers around church choir, Karaoke, and West Valley Chorale. My creativity is basically creating costumes for performances or outfits for daily wear. I’m a collector. I collect everything. Love antiques!

What’s the best thing you’ve read in the last five years?

The best thing I’ve read in the past five years is Barbra Streisand’s memoir titled, “My Name is Barbra.” She is the first woman to write, produce, direct, and star in a major motion picture. Another inspiring and trend-setting woman is Michelle Obama in “Becoming.”



Ms. Senior AZ Pageant 2016

What is your favorite movie of all time?

My favorite movie of all time is "Gone with the Wind," because Scarlet always went back to Tara, her homeland, when she hit rock bottom. I feel like when I land on Nebraska soil where I was born and raised, it restores my soul.

What is the best concert you have ever been to?

I can't pick just one concert as the best. In 1976 I was fortunate to spend a summer in Aspen, Colorado attending the Music Festival. Graduate-level credits were earned through Boulder, Colorado University. The staff was Julliard and Eastman instructors. Concerts were a daily routine. Itzhak Perlman, the violinist, was a regular. Danny Kaye was a special guest with his rewarding antics.

What is on your bucket list?

I don't have a bucket list. At this point in life I am preparing myself to be ready to meet my maker and join in His Holy Choir singing His praises.

What are you most thankful for?

I am most thankful for my health. Singing is a benefactor of that with good breathing technique.

What would you sing at Karaoke night?

My Karaoke vibe ranges from Schubert's "Ave Maria" to Marilyn Monroe's rendition of "I Wanna Be Loved By You." Not your typical song choices.



What is something people would never guess just by looking at you?

Something people would never guess just by looking at me is that I am basically very shy.



What are you most proud of yourself for?

I am most proud of myself for making a difference and influencing hundreds of children's lives. I had a private piano studio of 55 students teaching Robert Pace's conceptual multiple-key approach, as opposed to the middle C center. It provided a half-hour partner lesson with 2 pianos and a 45-minute group theory musician class. Lots of recitals. I also taught vocal production.

I taught K-12 vocal music in public and private schools. Later I taught 12 years of "First Grade, going on to college," as I like to call it. Never underestimate the power of a teacher.



Of course, I'm so proud of my only daughter who has worked in the medical field, in research, at Seattle Children's Hospital for 17 years. She is an excellent musician and sings with the Seattle choral ensemble, The Esoterics. Like mother, like daughter.