

Meet Elizabeth Giannini - Alto 2



Tell us about your life.

It was World War II and my mother, sister, and I became camp followers, following my father from base to base when he was in the country. First was Caribou, Maine where my sister and I shared a room across the hall from my parents, over a restaurant. We

also had a cabin in the woods in the summer. School did not start until all the potatoes were picked. Next, was Manchester New Hampshire, and my teacher taught two grades in one big classroom. Then, we stayed with my grandparents in Pennsylvania when my father was in Iceland and Greenland. Last was a stint in Newport, Virginia. Finally, after the war we moved to Manhasset, Long Island where, finally I could take piano lessons. My grandmother was a pianist and singer so I took after her. Then we moved again for it was the middle of the Cold War and Father was concerned about Nuclear warfare so we finally ended up in New Jersey.

At the age of 13, my parents discovered that I had a very bad curvature of the spine that required two major operations with bone graphs, to fuse my spine. This required me to be in an immobile cast for about four months and then in a body cast for the rest of the year. Obviously, I completely recovered and I thank them, for at my age, my back never gives me trouble.

In college, Bucknell in Pennsylvania, I was in their touring chorus. After college and Katharine Gibbs Secretarial School, I worked in New York City and joined our local church choir where I met the love of my life, Walter Giannini. He was the director and organist and also a composer and teacher.



High School Yearbook Photo



**Elizabeth with Sons Brian and Gregory
Christmas 1970**

We married and had two boys, right away, as he was 20 years older than me. We settled in Randolph, New Jersey in an 1884 schoolhouse on a stream. We both taught piano there for 40 years. We also purchased a small log cabin in Pennsylvania which I used as a summer getaway after I moved to Arizona.

My husband had a lot of concerts of his music performed by The Masterwork Chorus conducted by David Randolph. One of the performances of his Mass was at the Kennedy Center in 1976 for the Bicentennial. I also sang in his 2nd Mass, with the same chorus, performed in Morristown, New Jersey, conducted by Wayne Walters.

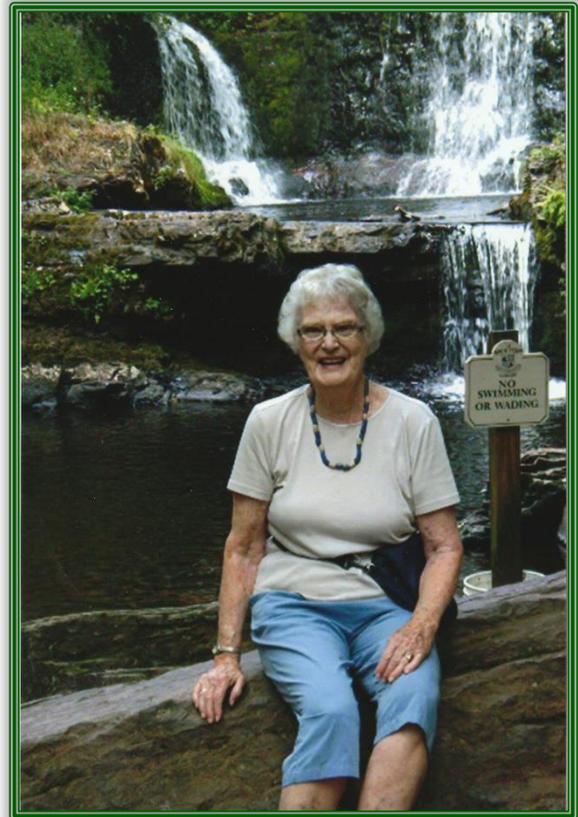
When did you become involved with the WVC?

Twenty-two years ago my husband of forty-three years died and that is when I moved to Arizona. I joined the West Valley Chorale about twenty years ago. I also sing with the Westbrook Village Voices. I love

the choice of music that we sing in West Valley Chorale, as I have always been partial to classical music.

Do you have any hobbies?

I love boating, I had a canoe, also hiking. I joined the hiking club when I came to Arizona. Our cabin in Pennsylvania had many waterfalls close by and I volunteered for a while for the U.S. Park Service and worked for a year for the Pocono Environmental Center giving school tours. Now at my age, I volunteer for the Musical Instrument Museum.



What are you most proud of yourself for?

I was always a nervous performer so I determined that I had to do it more often. And I wanted to learn to play the pipe organ. A local church needed a choir director and organist, so I volunteered to give it a shot. I really worked hard for about a year, took lessons on the pipe organ, and at the end of that time was hired by another larger church and did that for about fifteen years. It was interesting on Christmas

when we had a big Italian dinner and my husband and I had to play at two different churches.

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

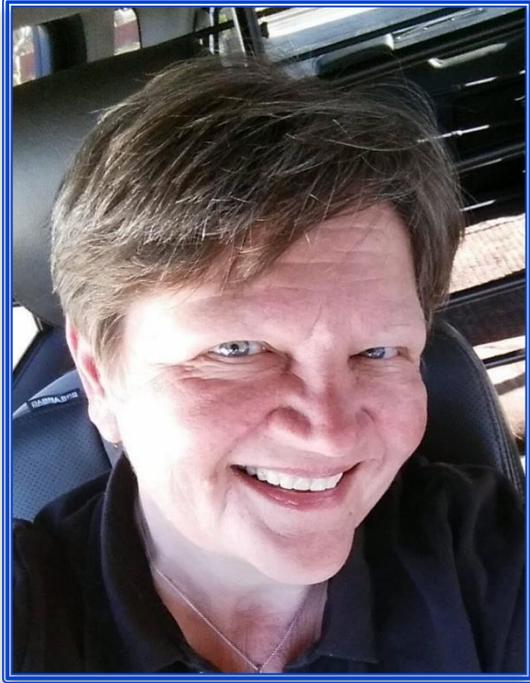
I have over 200 slides of the World Trade Center construction, as my father was one of the chief engineers at the construction site. He took my sister and me, as well as other family members up into the construction, where I got to see Windows On The World (restaurant) when there were no windows, and also to the roof. My sister was even on one of the freight elevators. Years later, my sister and I were invited to the opening of the National September 11th Memorial Museum as were all relatives of people who were killed in the attack, before the opening to the public. Two of my father's pictures are on permanent exhibit at the museum. I have also given presentations locally using his slides and construction information from a book, Twin Towers by Angus Gillespie.



What are you most thankful for?

My life, which has been Wonderful!

Meet Iris Johnson – Tenor 1



Tell us about your childhood.

I was born in the Netherlands in the first decade after the war, the youngest of five children.

I lived in Rotterdam, a city that had its center carpet bombed by the Nazis in May 1940. I remember that the center of the city had a lot of ugly, flat, unpaved empty spaces with just gravel. We often visited my father's friends in The Hague.



The Hague was fully built in the center, and I liked that a lot more. It took me another decade to understand that those empty places in Rotterdam were the bombed-out center that had not yet been rebuilt.

Did you play any musical instruments or sing in school?

I started playing the piano at age 5 and I had a wonderful piano teacher. She was the honorary mother of the Rotterdam Symphony Orchestra, a title she was given for having sheltered refugee musicians who left Hungary after the Russian invasion in 1956 and

Czechoslovakia in 1968 to become members of the orchestra. She had a big house, but they did at times

have to share 2 or 3 to a room. It could be hard to concentrate on the lesson while hearing people practice their parts in the different rooms.

There were lots of musical events in her house where the more accomplished piano students had an opportunity to accompany one of these refugee instrumentalists, and where we would get up close to a harp or a French horn or others. The Symphony gave her 2 tickets to each performance and so she took her more advanced students to



concerts with famous instrumentalists. I heard David Oistrakh perform the Brahms “Violin Concerto.”

What is your favorite concert experience?

My favorite concert experience was when I shook hands with Arthur Rubinstein after he played the “Schumann Piano Concerto,” followed by a Chopin encore, “The Heroic Polonaise (op. 53).” He was hardly taller than I am but his hands were huge.



I have always loved to sing more than play and I wanted to be a singer but my parents discouraged it because it would be difficult to make a living. So, I went to medical school. A very rational choice. I sang in various choirs during my student years and after moving to Canada in 1980. My favorite one before now was the choir of the Quebec Symphony Orchestra. My favorite among all the great works we sang was

*Tchaikovsky's "Dame de Pique," **The Queen of Spades**, that we sang in Russian.*

I moved to the US in 1999 and joined a small a capella group in New York City. We sang mostly Renaissance music and that was a wonderful new challenge.

When did you become involved with the WVC?

*After I moved out of the NYC area there was really no singing until I joined the West Valley Chorale in 2019, just before the pandemic. I was elected president in 2020. We couldn't sing as much as we wanted of course during my time on the board, and I am very happy that we are singing again with friends. I love our repertoire; my favorite so far is **Elijah**.*

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

I am a language buff. I speak 5 languages fluently and a few lines in another 4. Dutch is my native language. I am fluent in German, English, French and Friesian. Friesian is the second language spoken in the Netherlands. Maybe I'll find a nice piece for us to sing one day in Friesian.

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

Best read in the last five years: [Gentle Genius, the story of Felix Mendelssohn.](#)

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

My favorite composer is Brahms and, in particular the second movement of the "Violin Concerto." And the lovely lullaby "Guten Abend gut Nacht." It reminds me of my childhood when my grandmother, who had a wonderful voice, sang it for me when I was staying with her during summer holidays.

What is your favorite movie of all time?

*My favorite movie is **The Sound of Music.***

Do you have a hobby?

Hobbies: Golf, knitting and embroidery

What would you sing at Karaoke night?

*I have only been to one Karaoke night, and I sang "All I Ask of You" from **Phantom of the Opera** with a friend.*

What are you most proud of yourself for?

I am most proud of obtaining a second doctorate that I completed as a single mom of two young children.



What is on your bucket list?

Bucket list: A river cruise up the Rhine and visit the old European capitals.

