

Our Stories—Marie Younkin-Waldman and Myron Waldman

Marie Younkin Waldman and Myron Waldman have been members of UUCSC since 2005. Marie got to know Rev. Betty Kornitzer at meetings of the South County Women's Network and she and Myron decided to give the church a look. Of course that was when UUCSC was not looking too "churchy," but the Bingo Hall, as we referred to the American Legion building on Route 108 where we met on Sunday mornings, suited Marie just fine; coming from a formal Episcopalian background she appreciated the simplicity of the service and the ability to concentrate on the message and the spirit. And Unitarian Universalism's acceptance of all faiths made UUCSC a good fit for them as a couple as Myron had been brought up in the Jewish tradition. Marie and Myron have been involved with fundraising at the church, notably with the auctions held in the mid 2000s and more recently with the Holiday Fairs. Myron devoted a lot of time to the church during the move to Lily Pads and was very active in ensuring that services at UUCSC were accessible to the hearing impaired, lobbying for, designing, and supervising the installation of a hearing loop system and a new speaker system to benefit everyone.

Born in Virginia, Marie grew up in Maplewood, NJ. As a teen she moved with her family to Lausanne, Switzerland. She attended the American College in Paris which at the time was a two year school and returned to the states and Mary Washington College in Virginia to continue her education. Frustrated with the hearing loss that she had lived with since birth and the impact it had on her studies, Marie was unenthusiastic about school. It wasn't hard to fall in love with the tall, handsome, and smart Marine who soon became her husband.

It wasn't until eight years later when at the urging of a neighbor she fished her old hearing aids out of a drawer and decided to stop being embarrassed about her hearing loss. Now, living in Narragansett with four kids born within six years and a husband pursuing his PhD at URI she found that the RI Office of Rehabilitation (ORS) would not only provide her with new hearing aids, they would assist her in returning to school. Suddenly she was interested in everything! After years of changing diapers she enrolled at URI, majoring in biology with a minor in French. She graduated Cum Laude in 1976 and earned a Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Counseling in 1986. By that time her marriage had ended.

Myron, born in Rhode Island, did his undergraduate work at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in physics and engineering. Later, he started technical businesses based upon his scientific patents. He continues to work on several projects focused on the Internet and has published several papers. Marie and Myron met at a sign language class at which they were the only two people with hearing loss. They will be celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary this September. They each have four children and share a combined 16 grandchildren. Myron is the introverted 'ying' to Marie's extroverted 'yang.'

Marie has a dizzying array of jobs and enterprises on her resume including running a daycare business, teaching, counseling, working as an advocate for the hearing loss community, writing, and motivational speaking but it is perhaps her work producing and hosting the television show, *Tea with Marie*, that best showcases both her talents and her interests. For seven years Marie interviewed authors, musicians, artists and other interesting folks on Friday afternoons at tea time, in studio and sometimes on location around Rhode Island. Tea time was one of many genteel customs that Marie had learned from her adored southern grandmother whom she called Dearie and the tradition epitomizes Marie's desire to appreciate the small things in life, to slow down and see the beauty all around us.

In 2007 with her hearing becoming progressively worse and having met the necessary criteria, Marie decided to undergo surgery and receive a cochlear implant, a neuroprosthetic device that bypasses the damaged portions of the ear and directly stimulates the auditory nerve. Marie's hearing dramatically improved. Every

day brought a new excitement—understanding dialogue on the radio! improved communication with friends and family! the enjoyment of music! Marie has written about her life, the challenges of hearing loss and the changes following surgery in a series of essays, *To Hear the Birds Sing*, which she published in 2009. Myron was always encouraging of Marie's journey to self-discovery.

For many years now Marie and Myron have divided their time between Peace Dale and their condo on St. Simons Island off the coast of Georgia. They love the pace of life on the island, the beauty of the landscape, the excellent restaurants and cultural opportunities and they have built a community of friends there. They enjoy the new friends they have made at Unitarian Universalist of Coastal Georgia in Brunswick but their hearts remain with UUCSC. They are very busy in retirement. Myron keeps busy with many projects—both professional and as a volunteer and he is the chief cook of the household.

Even with the milder weather of the south, life in a pandemic has been difficult. All of their children live in the northeast and Marie and Myron are eager to see them and especially to HUG THEM. Marie can't wait to return to yoga and stretch class, to restaurants and in-person book and writing groups, to people...and to Sunday services at UUCSC. She hopes that maybe, just maybe, when the pandemic loosens its grip on us that people will be kinder to one another and some of the divisions in the world will lessen.

Elizabeth Donovan, March 2021