

Mary Corrigan

Visionary, Crusader, Ambassador, Mentor, and “Best Friend”

By Lucille Schutmaat-Rubin, Ph.D.

It was a warm August day in 1986 that the founding members of VASTA met in New York City to create an professional organization composed of voice & speech teachers, trainers, coaches and consultants. These members were: Mary Corrigan, Dorothy Mennen, Carol Pendergrast, Bonnie Raphael and myself. Dorothy became our President, Carol and Bonnie designed the Evaluation Guidelines and Code of Ethics. I authored the Training Guidelines and Mary Corrigan had her say in all of these endeavors plus addressing fairness in the workplace. Carolyn Combs served as secretary/treasurer and Evangeline Machlin, absent and retired, was our Advisor. Members came from different parts of the country, held diverse training methodologies and taught in unlike workplaces: university, conservatory, private practice and the media. Within one year VASTA was formed and we held our first conference in NYC 1987.

Mary Corrigan’s contributions to VASTA were stellar. She was a fast talker and an active listener. She helped us find neutral ground on issues on which we differed. A born persuader and crusader, she eased us into agreement with her warm smile and hearty laugh. Her cup of ideas overflowed and her contributions to VASTA are many. Here are a few:

Helped Shape our Guidelines

Mary was a restless soul who continually searched for new ways to teach Voice and Speech. Having explored the work of Yoga, The Alexander Method, Rolfing, Feldenkrais, Progressive Relaxation, Bio-Energetics and Charlotte Selver’s Sensory Awareness, she made sure that our Training & Evaluation

Guidelines included body awareness training. Going one step further her training focused on the importance of mind/body connection as seen in her article, “Psycho-Physical Techniques and the Relevance to Voice and Actor

Training” which appeared in *The Vocal Vision*, a collection of essays by VASTA members). Her M.A. degree in Theatre and Psychology reflects her interest in T’ai Chi, Chi Kung, Suzuki, Silva Mind Control and Transcendental Meditation. As Chair of the Theatre and Dance department at CU San Diego she was undoubtedly influenced by the work of their dance department.

Encouraged Study of Diverse Methodologies in USA & Abroad

Having studied with our American master teachers in the US, Mary looked abroad for new approaches to voice and speech training. In 1989 she was invited to teach for BADA (British Academy of Dramatic Art) at Oxford and moved to London for a period of 2 years only to return later for many summers. As co-director of UC San Diego Study Center for the UK & Ireland, she worked with actors, taught Shakespeare and classical text, attended performances with theater critics, and audited and took classes taught by actors and directors from the Royal National and Royal Shakespeare Companies. During her stay she taught in Scotland and at the American University in Cairo. These experiences moved her to encourage more of our VASTA members to go abroad and study new methodologies. In the VASTA newsletter of 1991 she wrote “Study Opportunities for Training in the UK” and gave details of every drama school and training center and how to contact them. Shortly thereafter, VASTA held its first Conference in London. Even though VASTA had its own liaison committee, it was Mary who became an ambassador for VASTA in that she encouraged our members to study abroad while also spreading the work of VASTA abroad.

Fought for Fairness in the Workplace: Promotion, Pay and Tenure

Mary’s passion, fervor for fairness and her soft negotiation skills helped bring attention to workplace fairness. She served on both VASTA and CU San Diego Grievance/Appeals committees. In her report to our board in 1988 she



Mary Corrigan, Professor Emerita at the University of California, San Diego, was a member of the Theatre and Dance Department faculty for thirty years. An internationally known voice teacher, Mary Corrigan conducted numerous Master Voice classes and Workshops in Canada, Egypt, England, France and around the United States. Notably, also, she taught at Balliol College Oxford, England (BADA) for 19 summers. In her extensive acting career, she received the Best Actress Award at San Diego’s Tony Award-winning Old Globe Theatre in 1979. One of the founders of VASTA, Corrigan coached and consulted on numerous professional theatre productions. She published in VASTA journals and authored chapters in each of the following books and tapes: *The Vocal Vision (Applause Books)*, *The Complete Voice and Speech Workout (Applause Books)*, *The Dancer’s Handbook*. She also narrated Natl. Public Radio tapes on Chopin and George Sand.

brought up several issues: “Do we have recognition in Theatre/Drama departments ... directors, actors? What about protecting [our] copyrights? Do we have recourse and with whom?” These and related issues were later addressed in many on-going VASTA conferences thanks to Mary’s initiatives. Many Voice & Speech trainers are using VASTA’s website (vasta.org) for current information on Promotion and Tenure. This information is especially useful to those teaching in Higher Education Institutions.

Starred as Personal Mentor

I doubt that Mary knew how to teach without in some way making a deep connection with every student, teacher or client with whom she worked. VASTA has its own mentoring program but that never stopped Mary from making deep one on one connections with everyone. She made each of us feel as if we were her “Best Friend.” Perhaps it truly was a magic breath connection she felt with others. In her “Breath Journal Exercise” in *The Complete Voice and Speech Workout* (containing 74 exercises submitted by VASTA members), she writes:

“If you think you are holding your breath, do two things. “First, be thrilled that you are becoming aware of your major saboteur of good voice production and a major deterrent to your spontaneous and immediate release of an acting text. (Lack of spontaneity can also get in the way of day-to-day interpersonal relationships!)” So like Mary to show how breath release can connect us all! And that she did.

Mary Corrigan marched to her own drum & heartbeat. Everything Mary did, she did with her heart: she acted with her heart, she taught with her heart and she gave to others with her heart. Now that heart is still but her beat goes on.

*Fear no more the heat o’ the sun,
Nor the furious winter’s rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages...*

Thank you, Mary, for your heart, gifts, contributions to VASTA and being “My Best Friend.”

Lucille Schutmaat-Rubin, Ph.D. *A founding, Honorary and Distinguished VASTA member, past president of the University & College Theater Association and world-wide workshop presenter; Lucille Schutmaat-Rubin, Ph.D. is a voice, speech, presentation & media coach serving the needs of executive speakers, Broadway actors, TV and radio reporters and hosts. She is President of Professionally Speaking in NYC and on the faculty of Circle in the Square Theatre School.*



Our Mary, Ever Curious, Ever Generous.

By Ursula Meyer

I first met Mary when I was acting at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival in 1979. Bonnie Raphael was my voice coach - my first voice coach and the person who first made me curious about this wonderful profession - and Mary had come to visit during rehearsals. Mary was ebullient and passionate and gave me some very tough notes that I still cherish. I think that was what made Mary so marvelous. She was as bright as a star all day every day and relentlessly positive, but she never held back when things needed to be said. When I was called to come to UCSD, I knew I would have to produce some big sound in order to fill the void left when Mary retired. She welcomed me to UCSD with joy and laughter and we started a friendship. She included me in VASTA ideas, she supported me in new projects, she warned me about burn-out, she brought me into her circle with the wonderful Eva Barnes and Jan Gist and we became a little lunch party several times a year. And each time we met, Mary led us like a majorette to poetry, hearty full-throated hilarity, strong opinions, and a little dessert. She was passionately interested in every tiny facet of our lives, even though her life was incredibly full of family, community, her own teaching, and her plans for the future. That was another source of inspiration for all of us - she never wasted a minute - she demanded that we look forward - that we celebrate our work and each other - that we continue to make plans for the future. But that kind of child-like living in the present did not reduce her depth and wisdom. In Eva Barnes’ lovely dedication to Mary at the memorial,



Mary Corrigan

Eva outlined one of Mary's favorite exercises. Eva had done the exercise while working with Mary in graduate school. In my voice class this Fall, I decided to use it with my students. It is a very simple exercise, no bells and whistles, no props, no long-winded explanations in order to begin. It is a variation on Kristen Linklater's exercise using the phrase: "I am me". The students just have to stand in front of the group, breathe, and speak the words. I'm sure the voice teachers reading this will not underestimate the size of that thought. But of course, the students were very surprised at what it meant to simply let some air in and speak that truth. And I realized at that moment, it is still so difficult for me to reconcile the who in who am I. But Mary Corrigan was different. She was always 'Mary' and never afraid to say it - proud and loud and fierce and smart and generous and firm and a fresh young girl and a wiser than wise woman and a friend and a hero and a shining light.

Ursula Meyer has been teaching Voice and Text and coaching for the theatre since 1981. She came in 1995 from the Yale School of Drama to UC San Diego to fill the graceful dancing shoes of dear Mary Corrigan. She trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama with David Carey and is a designated Linklater teacher.



Remembering Mary Corrigan

By Jan Gist

It's hard to conceive of the world that no longer includes Mary Corrigan. I get it, for a few minutes at a time—that she's gone. But then as I go about my day, my unconscious assumption returns that of course Mary is still in the world, flitting between her travels, attending San Diego theatre and concerts, and arranging her many activities with her many friends in so many different circles: her poetry and writing groups, women's walking group, her loved family, reading for the blind at KPBS, teaching her private students, rendezvousing with voice teacher friends from around the world. From when I first met Mary in the 1970s to our last lunch date a week before her stroke, Mary was a never ending fountain of enthusiasm and gusto.



Impressions:

- ~Her varying shades of red hair as bright as her personality
- ~Her laugh, from light giggles, to deep naughty chuckles, to loud, head-back guffaws.
- ~Her never ending compliments and advice for everyone from close friends, to VASTA agendas, to the waitress pouring coffee.
- ~Her effervescent joy and relish of life, people, food, drink, adventures, travel, theatre, training, art... she just kept on exploring and playing.
- ~Her naughtiness: a love and gift for gossip and the sensual sides of life, spoken in hushed confidence, and cushioned with empathy for human frailty, political savvy, and raw instinct.
- ~Her cars: elegant, comfortable, with the latest technology, and her delight in the convenience of her handicap-parking permit.
- ~Her insightful knowledge of voice, theatre, and training: She specialized in helping it all get more lively, fun, and free.
- ~Her generosity: she would focus her multiple energetic interests on one person or project and just keep pouring her time lavishly in that direction.
- ~Her insistence that work be balanced in life: she headed VASTA conference panels and discussions on facing our tendencies toward workaholism, and teach each other strategies for improving our life/work balance.
- ~Her homes: so gracefully decorated in whites and blues and sunlight, and also stuffed with books, recordings, and ever shifting piles of things to give away.

We voice/speech people live in an interaction with vibration. We influence all the voices we can, to reverberate and activate. Mary's presence did and still does vibrate, reverberate, and influence. So, of course it seems like she's still here. I wish she were really actually still with us. But then I'm greedy for her kind of aliveness.

Jan Gist, Professor/Coach Old Globe Theatre & USD Graduate Program since 2001. Prior to that, Voice/ Speech coach at Alabama Shakespeare Festival for 140 productions. Other credits include Oregon and Utah Shakespeare Festivals, The Shakespeare Theatre, Arena Stage, American Shakespeare Center, American Players Theatre. International workshops include The Moscow Art Theatre, and London's Central School.

