



Marion Moran. Photo by Brent Nicastro

'I Give My Students Time To Be Alone'

Marion Moran is a naturalist who conducts her "Walks on the Wild Side" for the UW-Extension all over the state; she also teaches regularly at The Clearing in Door County. Moran was born in Fond du Lac in 1927, one of eight children. Her parents were Swiss, her father "a hunter and fisherman" and her mother a housewife. "My grandmother was a botanist," she says, "and I followed in her footsteps." Moran now has three children and three grandchildren of her own. Her husband, Gene, has been with the UW Arboretum in Madison for 30 years and is in charge of its maintenance, including the annual burning of the prairies.

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"Rachel Carson said that in gaining knowledge it was not half so important to know as to feel—and that's the way I teach.

"I think we are doing more than cataloging plants and animals and making certain that everyone knows their Latin

questions: How has the pattern of growth in its life helped that tree become what it is today? How has the pattern of growth in your life helped you become what you are today?

"It's surprising how the tree helps people see that they are not alone. The tree also helps them see that life is cyclical, that life is not only taking from the earth—the mother—but also giving back.

"That was the traditional Native American way of looking at life, and over the years I have come more and more to identify with the Native Americans in my teachings.

"Of course, not all people are ready for that. Once, on a night walk, a man said to me he certainly didn't get anything 'spiritual' out of it. When I asked him what he did get out of it, he said, 'I learned that there's no amount of Off that will keep mosquitoes away.' He also said I shouldn't be quoting Indians about nature!

"But we have to remember that this man didn't want to be there in the first place. His wife signed him up for the night walk, and so he came wearing his blinders and was still wearing them when he left.

"In this computer age, we're being drawn away from the sensory experience of the world—hearing crickets, hearing the wind.

"One night, Gene and I stepped inside a video arcade in one of the malls, and we just watched the kids playing their games. Finally, I yelled at Gene—I really yelled—"These kids should be out on a night walk!" But no one heard me because there was so much noise, so much distraction. The kids were all plugged into their own world, and that's not a quiet world.

"My hope in the long run is that the children of the world will have a world at all. As a grandparent, you want your grandchildren to have eagles in the world, because you had eagles in yours.

"I don't think anyone ever put that hope better than Chief Luther Standing Bear when he said, 'Let us put our minds together and see what life we will make for our children.'

"Somewhere along the line, we have to be aware of what is happening to us. We are alienated from the earth, and we simply cannot live that way.

"We need to realize, to know, this truth: *If the wilderness doesn't survive, if the wildlife doesn't survive, we don't survive.* It's all old stuff to the Old Ones.



Listening In with George Vukelich

names. I think what we are doing is dealing with life and creation and the great mystery that we are all part of—only most of us don't know it.

"In our environmental teaching, we touch more upon the spiritual side of nature. Our classes are patterned after the 'vision quest' that Native Americans have historically undertaken.

"I give my students time to be alone—and space to be alone in—so that they can relate to nature, not only in a broad, general sense, but in a very specific way. For example, to a tree.

"I have my students 'adopt' a tree and regard that tree as another life sharing the planet with them. Most people are taken aback at first, because most people don't really regard trees as 'other lives.' It is a whole shift of perception, of consciousness.

"Then, I have my students ask themselves