

# School Song/Marilynn Highland Podcast

## September 2021

**TORI:** Hi, my name is Tori Andres.

**JOSH:** I'm Josh Peterson.

**PABLO:** I'm Pablo Contreras.

**TORI:** We just recently spoke with Marilyn Highland, a 1957 graduate of MSAB.

**JOSH:** For those of you who don't know, she is the composer of our school song.

**PABLO:** One of the first questions we asked her was what inspired the lyrics of the song.

**MARILYNN:** Ah, I guess just my strong feelings for the school. I... I just felt we had the best of both worlds in this situation that we were in, and felt extreme loyalty to the school and still do.

**PABLO:** We went on to discuss what it was like for the students to live at the school.

**TORI:** Some small, interesting details, like the fact that they were able to go to Sunday Church services right down the street.

**JOSH:** Yeah, they were all pretty much like one big happy family.

**MARILYNN:** And I think that was the, my big point is, is that we were kind of family because we were together 24/7 and back when I went to school at MSAB. Back then it was Minnesota Braille and Sight Saving School. We didn't go home on weekends as I understand now all of you do. So, we were there 24/7 except for vacations and some of the students even stayed for vacation. I never did. I, I would have screamed bloody murder. I think it was an imposition on my parents. It was really a hardship sometimes to afford to bring me home and back 'cause I lived about 200 miles from the school, but they did it. But, some of the students stayed for MEA and for Easter.

**TORI:** Something interesting is the difference between the dorm situations now and back then.

**JOSH:** For instance, students now arrive on Sunday nights and Monday mornings and leave Friday afternoons.

**PABLO:** Yeah, those students were at school pretty much all week. We had asked her that if she had the option to, would she have gone home on the weekend? And yeah.

**MARILYNN:** Like probably in grade school I would have, but the interesting thing is that when I was in 10th grade, by then my father had passed away, and my mom and my brother moved down to Minneapolis. And I could have gone home any weekend I suppose and I didn't. I didn't go home for very many; by the time I got high school I enjoyed my friends and the weekend activities and so on. But yes, probably when I was in grade school I would have opted to go home.

**TORI:** We really enjoyed speaking with Marilyn about just the general atmosphere and what life was like here in the 50s at MSAB.

When Marilyn went to school here, they had East and West Cottage for the boys, and the second and third floor of Dow Hall was for the girls.

**JOSH:** Currently at MSAB we have 3 dorms, an apartment and a house.

**MARILYNN:** Back in my day, we didn't have automatic washers, so now you know doing laundry is a lot easier than it was back then, but I still, yes, I wish we'd had some of that. We did have a good home ec department, and so we learned to clean and sew and cook and that sort of thing. But we didn't, yeah, laundry wasn't something we focused on. Or just being a part of. My mom was really good at showing me how to do things at home, but some of the kids didn't have that advantage.

My class was the first class to graduate in the...well, I say new gym back then. So that was 1957. That was that was quite a while ago, but I still think of it as the new gym. But the activities building.

**PABLO:** What we really wanted to know was how the school song came about.

**TORI:** I thought it was really cool how they allowed students to be the ones to write the school song because it really shows what this school means to them.

**MARILYNN:** But at that time there was one. There was a music instructor. The girls had a music instructor and the boys had an instructor and the girls' instructor was Marion James, who was a local Faribault person. And I guess they had had a school song years before that, but it had kind of died away or people had forgotten it. And she felt we should have a school hymn and a school rouser. And I at that time sang in a girls' trio. And so one day at practice we gathered the three of us gathered around the piano with Mrs. James and we wrote the school rouser. I don't know if you sing the school rouser anymore, but that was, anyway, that was a collaborative effort among the three of us in the trio and Mrs. James. She wrote the music and we kind of jointly composed the words.

We three girls, um, composed the words to the, to the rouser. And then she said, well, "We should have a contest for the school song," for the hymn, which is the one that you all still sing, I think.

And, uh, well, I think I was the only one that entered the contest. I like writing poetry. From the time I was probably in 4th grade, and so that was more up my alley than it might have been for some of the other students. And so, I brought Mrs. James the words that I put together, and she composed the music, so that's the story behind the school song.

**JOSH:** We came across an old recording of the school song from the Centennial celebration in 1966.

**TORI:** In this recording of this school song, it is the choir of singing it with teacher John Gillin and introducing them. Interestingly, the gym would actually later be named after John Gillin.

**Voice on recording:** "Students have always expressed school loyalty through school songs and we have ours too. The school choir will sing for you, our school song, written by Miss Marilynn Dixon in 1956, and our Centennial verse, written by Miss Janice Grow, in 1966.

**MUSIC:** MSAB School song, sung in 4-part harmony.

**JOSH:** Special thanks to Marilynn for giving us her time for the fun interview over the phone.

**TORI:** This is Tori.

**JOSH:** Josh.

**PABLO:** And Pablo.

**TORI:** Signing off.

**PABLO:** Boom.