



## *Carol Wharton A Talented, Artistic Eta Mu Member*

**An Interview by Debbie Mar, V.P. Membership**



- ***You are one Eta Mu's earliest members joining in 1984. Can you tell me how you first learned about Eta Mu?***

I was teaching at Enslin Elementary School in 1984. My son was born in 1983. My principal at the time was Lana Truemler who was also an Eta Mu member. She encouraged me to join ETA MU while I was a young teacher. I respected her for being the best Room Parent and staying up late hours to prepare for her lessons. She is also the one who donated the ETA MU Crest for installations which we still use today. I was attracted to ETA MU for two reasons: Most of the women in the organization were my mother's age whom I could look up to as a 32-year-old teacher who was learning to converse. Another reason is because I was so impressed that everything Eta Mu did was done with such elegance, style, and pride.

The older women took me under their wing, sharing everything with me and taught me to do my best. These mentors were Betty Harrell, Bev DeBoer, and Nyla Rossiter. We used to meet at Baker's Square, a pie shop. Eventually, they encouraged me to become President, taking over for Nyla Rossiter's position as President for half a year and presiding as President the next full year. My secretary at the time was Adele Little and together we would do the Eta Mu monthly newsletter. I attended a leadership meeting at UOP and quite a few conventions. I recall getting on an elevator at the convention and hearing another educator remark that I was too young to be part of the convention. Nyla Rossiter defended me and said, "Not at all, she has a Master's in Early Childhood Education."

- ***What were some of the highlights of your teaching Career? What were some of the challenges?***

I started teaching at Shackelford Elementary School at the age of 23. While I taught the early elementary grades, after school I would teach chorus to 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. We would put on school performances for the other grade levels at Modesto High School singing John Denver songs.

My 1<sup>st</sup> teaching partner was Genevieve Alldrin who is 93 now. We would decorate bulletin boards and make up songs for every letter of the alphabet. It became my goal to teach them songs that they could take into their future. Teaching music by reading lyrics also reinforced reading skills. In 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, by using the record player, the students learned to operate the record player, listen to the songs, then learned the words by reading.



I taught 2<sup>nd</sup> grade for more than a decade. Five of those years my grade level partner was with Marilyn Gresham. We began to transform the entire classroom environment from floor to ceiling depending on the theme of what the students were learning. The story of The Kapok Tree was one of the favorite themes with life size trees, Tarzan ropes and huge leaves adorning the classroom. The Solar System in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade was another colorful, vibrant theme. By this time, we were also doing performances, complete with costumes, art, and music, inviting other classrooms to come and watch.

Some of the challenges included trying to keep up with the ever-changing technology. Always watching for bullying was an ongoing challenge. I once had a class with 22 boys and 8 girls. Trying to juggle them into cooperative groups was a struggle. I still have regret over one boy who

just wouldn't cooperate with singing. I wish I could have sat him down and talked persuasively to him about the importance of allowing songs to enter his life.

- ***In addition to being a teacher, you also had extracurricular activities that you were involved in Art and Music. What were some of these activities? How have they blossomed now that you are retired?***

In 2007 I was encouraged to join Sweet Adelines International by my principal at Enslin Elementary School, Deborah Grochau. She invited me to a Friends and Family program where the local group River Lights Chorus was singing two numbers for a regional contest in Sacramento. I was so impressed that I decided to join them, rearranging my schedule to leave early after school to be a part of the chorus training. Learning how to sing in a 4-part harmony allowed me the opportunity to grow artistically apart from my classroom environment. I was involved in dual choruses with River Lights Chorus and Sacramento Valley Chorus, sometimes from Thursday to Sunday. I feel my teaching career had enhanced my music career. I now coach others in my home. Sometimes people come weekly from Sacramento, learning the songs at home, and then sending the recordings to the director or section leader. My office has become a recording studio to download on the computer.

My art has also developed from the classroom days of butcher paper art to yards and yards of phenomenal murals and paintings as we decorate the hall for our annual River Lights High Tea.

I also joined the Mistlin Gallery traveling to different schools to teach and demonstrate forms of art and to explain the history of them. In addition, my backyard has become an Art Studio for teaching Art Lessons.



- ***What advice can you give to a young teacher?***

I would advise her to relax. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Focus on the part of the curriculum you like the most. Consider this new situation an opportunity for you and your students to grow. You are brand new to them and they are brand new to you. Be positive-the sun is always shining. Allow your life to be filled with inspiration. There are always strong, powerful women you can tap into. And songs can bring you joy for every season.