

## Appreciation of Mary Ann McCleary

I met Mary Ann McCleary when I was closing in on 40. I had wanted a family since concluding as a young adult that the world would not end in nuclear disaster anytime soon. In the years since my short 1972 marriage ended, I had been unsuccessful in starting a family. I made mistakes – I passed up one who made an ideal wife for somebody else – but found in general that feminism had put women off marriage in general and motherhood in particular.

Starting a new job, I was partnered with this lovely, capable woman in her late 20s. She knew me as the bicycle guy – I was already using one to commute. She was surprised when I picked her up for our first date in a Mercedes sports car. But... she wanted a career. After a few months she broke it off, and I resumed my search.

Then, a while later, she got a promotion she had nobody with whom to celebrate. We got back together. She overcame her misgivings. An attractive, successful young woman willing to start a family was a pretty good deal. Recognizing that no marriage is perfect, I didn't entertain second thoughts.

Mary Ann moved into my house in Glover Park, Washington D.C., where our three children were born. I was content with St. Patrick's Episcopal School and living where we were. I liked our neighborhood and our neighbors. She wanted a bigger house, in Montgomery County where the schools were reputed to be better. We had the money, and she prevailed. Our house in the Mohican Hills section of Bethesda was twice as large.

Life changed. Our neighbors were professors, ambassadors, health officials, lawyers and World Bank people. Above our social class - we never developed close friendships. There were two boys of our son Jack's age but no playmates for our daughters. There were no sidewalks – the family drove everywhere. Except for me. Though I remained a bicycle commuter, none of the children developed any enthusiasm for cycling.

Mary Ann and I were incompatible in many ways.

1. She came from a long line of working-class Democrats. It was (and remains) just part of their identity. They didn't think or argue politics. My parents were Eisenhower (not Reagan!) Republicans who did discuss politics.
  2. She is half-Japanese by blood and mostly Japanese in mentality. Her concerns are duty and face. She is very attuned to the beliefs of her group. I am German by blood and nature. I am stubborn and demanding of scientific proof, and mostly impervious to the opinions of others.
  3. We have different values, as reflected in our takes on Jonathan Haidt's six moral foundations.
    - Care/Harm Mary Ann wants to be seen as caring. To me, caring must be reciprocal. I don't care for people who don't care for me.
    - Fairness/Cheating Fairness is important to Mary Ann – hence her feminism. I believe that humans are differently endowed, and it is natural that they should achieve different levels of success.
    - Loyalty/Betrayal Loyalty to her people, her country etc. is not very important to her. I yearn to be loyal to my country and my tribe – if only they were loyal to me.
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| • Authority/Subversion | Mary Ann believes the authorities – government, doctors, media and educators. She is no rebel. I question everybody. |
| • Sanctity/Degradation | Mary Ann is not religious; She has no belief in God or society. I believe in my people, my society, and God.         |
| • Liberty/Oppression.  | Mary Ann is not highly committed to liberty, bowing easily to authority. I am a great believer in personal liberty.  |

4. We are separated by the biggest generation gap in American history. I am decidedly Silent Generation; she is a Baby Boomer. I read; she gets her information from television. I have traditional beliefs about sex, love and family. She does not. In practice she is conservative, but in philosophy she is progressive.

Our incompatibility made itself clear step by step. My generation prized continuity. I inherited my family's values with regard to sex, marriage, discipline and so on. Mary Ann was torn. Her father and mother were traditional Irish American and Japanese, with appropriate notions about sex and family. Her mother believed in duty and not shaming the family. Father loved kids and presumably wanted his children to marry and produce good Catholic grandchildren.

Mary Ann and her siblings thus grew up with a sense of discipline. They did their homework and helped as asked around the household, although mother did most of the work. Mom was the boss.

Mary Ann and I didn't talk about our philosophies - she does not intellectualize these things. The sexual revolution convinced her that restraint had kept her from enjoying life and led her sisters to unfortunate decisions. She did not want to impose such restrictive expectations on our children. She wanted them to fully enjoy the fruits of the revolution. She went along with the progressive views of sex and family that prevailed in Montgomery County's public schools, public life and general public. She conveyed the message to the girls by getting them on birth control as they entered their teens. It was consistent with messaging from the schools and Bethesda society.

Mary Ann did not want to prepare our children for marriage. She was openly disinterested in having grandchildren. If she had thought about it – maybe she did – she would have followed the Planned Parenthood line about there being too many babies born. In any case, she wanted to get the girls ready for careers. As she had done.

She felt we had money enough to spare the children hard work. Let the housekeeper do it. We could afford tutors to help with schoolwork – why demand that the children do it themselves?

Mary Ann trusted the authorities: medical, school, police and so on. I tend to be skeptical. She kept the children home from school and took them to the pediatrician at the slightest cough. I would have waited. She accepted vaccinations without question. She trusted the school-provided experts on every kind of therapy, and psychiatrists and psychologists on ADHD, depression and such. I was unsure but did not have information or allies to resist. She supported sex education – condoms on bananas and such and talks about the normalcy of homosexuality. I thought it did not belong in schools.

Mary Ann was reluctant to discipline our children. She refused to believe that our daughter Naomi was lying – which she did all the time. She tolerated the kids' being lazy, letting us parents and the housekeepers do all of the washing, ironing, cleaning, gardening and dishes while they slept until noon on weekends. She allowed the kids to be driven everywhere instead of walking or cycling.

All in all, she was a creature of her time and place. I was the throwback, out of time and out of place. She was neither surprised nor shocked by the family decay – wife-swapping, divorce, drug use and so on – we saw around us. It bothered me because I am conservative by nature. Moreover, having grown up in San Francisco, I had seen how sex, drugs and a louche lifestyle had destroyed my high school and college classmates. But our kids' friends, and their parents, were financially and socially successful while embracing values I considered dangerous. I was the odd man out.

I wanted to develop a home-centered business so we could be around the kids. Mary Ann wanted her own company. I wanted a congenial neighborhood; she wanted a nice big house. On the mistaken conviction that an Episcopal school would teach religion and traditional values, I was

ready to invest in private education. Public school was fine with her – why spend the money when we could save it for retirement? She wanted a secure job and income. I wanted an investment portfolio that the children could inherit through trusts. She wanted to provide for her own retirement and let the children follow their own careers and fend for themselves.

We worked through our differences throughout twenty-five years of marriage. I worked out religiously on my exercise equipment. She and the kids were not interested. I learned languages. She had no interest. I took active vacations where I could work alongside and talk to native peoples. She looked for warm beaches where she could lie in the sun.

I did most of the cooking, for which she did express gratitude. I gardened for vegetables, she for ornamentals, letting me do the spade work. The kids would help somewhat with the easy stuff, never with the shovel. She and the children watched TV. I read.

Children were the wedge that drove us apart. Schools taught them about the evil white man, the patriarchy and so on. School and television taught them to disrespect, argue with and ignore their father. Mary Ann tolerated, and I suspect even encouraged it. The kids were willing on the one hand to accept cars, vacations and free rides through college while on the other hand arguing against, belittling and shunning the guy who had made it possible. Jack neither had nor wanted girlfriends – pornography was easier. The girls treated their boyfriends horribly.

With no grandchildren or companionship in old age to look forward to, I decided after one especially splanetic, half-hour rant by our youngest daughter Suzy that I had no future in the family. I said I wanted a divorce.

Mary Ann was not surprised. Neither were the children. Asking who had initiated it, they made it clear that their mother had long been discussing the question.

Mary Ann was all business in handling the separation. No evil words were spoken by either of us. It was a civilized process. As I had learned to expect witnessing other divorces, she got far the best of the financial settlement. Though I had brought most of the wealth into the family through my real estate and stock market investments, and the kids' college fully paid and provided for, she took about two thirds out. It was unfair, but I judged that acrimony would probably not serve me and would certainly disrupt a quick split. The divorce went through after thirteen months.

I went to Ukraine to start a new life. Mary Ann helped me, competently if grudgingly, iron out complications in my brokerage account occasioned by the divorce. Our son Jack was at loose ends after graduating from college. Though she didn't want him sharing her house, she was willing to support him. My opinion was that he could join the army if he had no other options. Naomi started her biotech career and Suzy continued at University College, Dublin.

So it went until December 2009, when Suzy spent two weeks in Kyiv with me and my bride-to-be Oksana. She enjoyed our hospitality, visited Chernobyl with me and managed to euvre some nice Christmas presents out of me. Then things blew up upon her departure.

Oksana and I were leaving on New Years Eve for a week's vacation in Sharm el Sheik. Suzy's flight out was late the evening before. And she missed her boarding call! She had to spend another day in Kyiv. Oksana and I did not have time to help her. We let her deal with it herself. She was 21 years old, had a credit card, and could get help from her mother by telephone.

I have no idea what happened, but neither Suzy nor Mary Ann have talked to me since refusing my few frantic phone calls about whether or not Suzy had gotten home. It has been fourteen years. Mary Ann does not respond to my emails, phone calls and postal mail. I sometimes learn second-hand about her life. As I write this, she is within a month of turning 70. What is her life like?

She has achieved her primary goal in life. She did not want to die poor like her grandfather or parents. She will not. Her business has done well, neither growing much nor shrinking but affording a comfortable professional income. I am sure that as a passive investor, following her financial advisor, her portfolio has grown. Her partners are more financially savvy than she. The pension fund that I advised them to establish will certainly provide more than adequate retirements.

The grandchildren that she didn't want never materialized. What we didn't expect was that two children would also disappear. Our son Jack, apparently living on the streets, hasn't been heard from for several years. Our daughter Naomi died in February 2023. That leaves only Suzy, who at last report was still living in Stockholm. Suzy has been prickly all her life. My guess is that she is not particularly close with her mother.

Mary Ann did not have many friends. Two in the neighborhood were Evelyn Suarez and Judy Costello, career women who had initiated acrimonious divorces, ruinous to their husbands, before I left. So far as I know they have no grandchildren to show for having raised seven children between them. Mary Ann Fisher, whom I had known before we married and who introduced Mary Ann to Mohican Hills, retired to Massachusetts more than a decade ago. They do not often talk. With no church affiliation and few neighborhood friends, my surmise is that her business partners are Mary Ann's primary social contact.

As my friends from the Starbucks group used to twit me, Mary Ann dated a handsome guy for a while in the years shortly after I left. They didn't marry and I haven't heard anything second hand about a boyfriend for years.

One reason for writing this is that I have some concerns for Mary Ann's health. Her mother died of cancer before hitting seventy. At that age her father was showing signs of Parkinson's and we (I) started to manage his affairs. At my invitation, he lived with us four years before the disease claimed him at 75.

Mary Ann has to have been multiply vaccinated against Covid-19. As a good Democrat and a believer in authority she would have accepted the message that she needed it. Evidence of vaccination would have been necessary to move in Washington DC society and to travel on business. In our single telephone conversation upon daughter Naomi 's sudden death she had no interest in even considering whether or not it might have been caused by vaccination.

Mary Ann had skin cancer a couple of decades back. She has a fairly weak constitution. I would not be surprised if she were afflicted by some of the many adverse effects reported for the Covid vaccinations, among them heart and circulation problems, reproductive system irregularities, autoimmune diseases and cancers.

For all these reasons it is an appropriate time to get these thoughts written down. Mary Ann is a good woman, very much a creature of her time, and as such fundamentally incompatible with me. I have certainly been blessed with a new life and three children since moving to Ukraine. I wish Mary Ann the best and pray for her health.

Graham Seibert  
November 21st, 2023

Substack preamble:

A Greek tragedy is a drama in which the protagonists are compelled to come into conflict by their own personal qualities, misunderstandings and by external circumstances. Tragedies do not necessarily pit good against evil, but rather dramatize human frailty.

My 25-year marriage to Mary Ann McCleary was such a situation. The values she absorbed from her family, neighborhood, education and especially the Washington D.C. environment and her generation were at odds with mine. She, being true to her values, and I to mine produced three children who were and are unsuccessful by almost any measure. Their failure undid our marriage.

Mary Ann has fiercely resisted communication over the past fourteen years. I doubt I will ever be able to explain that I don't blame her. We are all mortal, and there are several factors that could lead to her dying sooner rather than later. I trust that this piece will somehow find its way to her before then.

After some contemplation and editing I will post this on my web site, where like other commentary on my family and pieces of [appreciation](#) have been for a couple of decades.

[Graham](#)

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