



# The Teachers' Teacher

Professor Nancy Marano's passion for education influenced countless students as well as her family. A memorial scholarship established in her honor continues her legacy at Southern and beyond.

*By Natalie Missakian*

When Kristin Marano leaves the house — even if it's just for a quick run to the grocery store — she always brings a book with her “just in case.” It's a habit she learned from her mother, who was never without a book even when she became too ill to read them herself.

“We were encouraged to have a book with us wherever we were, wherever we went,” says Marano, who describes a childhood home filled with bookshelves. “We always had family discussions about what we were reading.”

Kristin's mother, Nancy Marano, '68, believed reading was the foundation for good writing, and she was passionate about passing on that skill to her own family and students.

At Southern, she was a longtime professor of education and an architect of the university's Writing Across the Curriculum program, which promotes writing in every academic discipline and offers workshops and tutoring for faculty and students. In a fitting tribute, the university dedicated a student writing competition in the professor's honor after her death in 2011. The Nancy Marano Writing Across the Curriculum Award annually recognizes the best student work completed in writing-intensive courses.

“In her mind, writing really was the essence of human society,” says her husband, John Marano, (pictured at left) of Madison, Conn. “She loved good writing, she loved her students, and she wanted her students to be able to communicate effectively.”

To honor that passion, he established the Nancy Laine Marano Endowed Scholarship Fund at Southern. The scholarship is open to a junior or senior in the School of Education who maintains a grade point average of 3.5 or higher. To be considered, applicants must write an essay explaining why they deserve the award.

“She was quite an effective communicator,” John Marano adds. “She had a special way with people, making them feel comfortable.”

One of her first students was none other than her husband.

The two met at a New Haven nightclub while John was at Yale University and Nancy was attending Western College. She had come home to the New Haven area for Thanksgiving break and, serendipitously, “it was one of the few times I hadn't gone home for a holiday,” he recalls. A friend of Nancy's suggested he ask her to dance. “I followed the advice,” he says. Soon after, she transferred to Southern, where she earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education. They married in 1968 and have two daughters, Kristin and Lauren.

Although John worked in engineering, his job required more and more writing as he climbed the corporate ladder into management.

“I needed a lot of help,” jokes Marano, who held corporate executive positions at Mobil and Union Carbide and now owns a company that makes medical devices. “She took me under her wing and helped me with my writing and communications, which I really believe helped my career. As time passed, if I had an important piece of writing for my job, she would review it and give me pointers, and I would do the same for her. We bounced things off of each other in that way.”

“She was always a teacher —  
as far back as I can remember.”

— *Kristin Marano*

Nancy Marano began her career as a special education teacher in Charleston, W. Va., specializing in children with learning disabilities, and later held teaching and tutoring positions in Princeton, N.J., and New Canaan, Conn. She earned a master's in special education from West Virginia Graduate College in 1977 and a doctorate in educational studies from the University of Michigan in 2000.

In 2001, she joined the faculty at Southern, where she was actively involved in academic life. In addition to serving on the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee, she was a member of the Autism Spectrum Disorders Advisory Board and was faculty advisor to the Future Teachers of America.

Professor of Mathematics Maria Diamantis, who worked closely with Marano, describes her colleague as enthusiastic, patient, and caring. “One of her students gave her a plaque that read ‘You Inspire Me,’” says Diamantis. “She kept it in her office, where she could easily see it and always be reminded of her mission. She was completely devoted to her students.”

“I only ever knew my mom as dedicated to the discipline of education,” says Kristin Marano, who now lives in Winston-Salem, N.C. “To say that she was passionate about it sounds limited and trite. It was more just who she was, foundational to her being, part of her core. She was always a teacher — as far back as I can remember.”

Marano says her mother often spoke of her students and how much she enjoyed watching future teachers in the classroom. “You could see the twinkle in her eye when she'd talk about them,” John Marano adds.

In her personal life, Marano believed strongly in human rights, women's rights, and helping the poor. She also was fiercely protective of those she loved, her husband says. Although diminutive in stature and typically reserved, she often surprised people when she spoke in defense of her beliefs. “She was calm but very determined,” John Marano says.

He remembers one family vacation in Cape Cod when a sales clerk spoke harshly to the couple's young daughters. Marano marched back into the store and gave the woman an earful about treating children with respect.

“She was reserved until you pushed her buttons,” he jokes.

Knowing how thrilled she would have been to help others obtain a college education, he says the family has enjoyed meeting some of the scholarship recipients, describing them as “wonderful, pleasant, and very smart students.”