

Marion H. Caldwell

September 1, 1912 – March 21, 2009

Marion Caldwell, known as “Aunt Marion” to thousands of Kennolyn Camps’ campers, died peacefully at her home on Saturday, March 21st. She was 96 years old.

Born in Winton, CA on September 1st, 1912 Marion was raised in California’s Central Valley on the family’s homesteaded ranch with sister Dorothy and brothers Earl and James Higginbotham. Her father was a teacher, eventually a superintendent of schools, and she too was called to a career in education. After attending Bakersfield Junior College and graduating from UC Berkeley, she taught Drama and Public Speaking to the diverse agricultural population at Fowler High School. At night she taught English to the immigrant Portuguese farm workers. It was in Fowler, in 1937 that she met, and 8 months later married, the love of her life -- another young teacher named Max Caldwell.

In 1944, Marion was raising their two children (Kenneth and Carolyn) when Max joined the Navy during World War II. Through extensive correspondence they kept their spirits up by making plans to open a summer camp for kids upon his return from active service. That dream became a reality in 1946 when they opened Kennolyn Camps on land they purchased in a redwood forest above the town of Soquel. The first summer the couple invited their nieces and nephews to the camp to supplement the small group of paying customers. These young relatives naturally called them “Aunt Marion” and “Uncle Max.” The names stuck and for generations of Kennolyn campers and staff it is how they will forever be remembered. Marion was a visionary and with her determination, keen business sense, and willingness to take the occasional risk, she was a natural entrepreneur. Their camp began to thrive, attracting campers from around the world. 2009 will be Kennolyn’s 64th summer and the camp will continue to operate under the guidance of Max and Marion’s family.



Marion was honored many times for her work with children and summer camps. She was a founding member of the Western Association of Independent Camps and Board Member of the Northern California Section of the American Camp Association, was honored as a “Super Pioneer” by her camp director peers, and was recognized by the US Congress, the California Legislature and the Governor of California for her achievements. In 2000, the Aptos Chamber of Commerce listed her and Max as “People of the Century.” Former California Secretary of State & State Senator Bruce McPherson commended them for “influencing the lives of thousands of young people.”



In 2003, a non-profit charity was created in their names by Kennolyn alumni and family to perpetuate Marion and Max’s great legacy. The Max and Marion Caldwell Foundation provides pre-paid camperships to deserving youth at accredited Northern California camps.

Marion is survived by her son Ken of Lafayette and daughter Carolyn Folmar of Watsonville, daughter-in-law Candy, son-in-law Roger, granddaughters Pam Nootbaar of Menlo Park (General Manager of Kennolyn) and Lindsey Johnson of Capitola, grandson Stephen Caldwell of Hermosa Beach, and many great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her beloved husband Max. Family was her greatest love.

A private family funeral was held on March 28th with a public memorial celebration scheduled at Kennolyn for Saturday April 25th. Please contact Kennolyn for information – 831-479-6714 or camps@kennolyn.com.

In lieu of flowers, a donation can be made in Aunt Marion’s honor to the Max and Marion Caldwell Foundation (www.caldwellfoundation.org or PO Box 1653 Capitola, CA 95010).