

Virginia Minolli '82

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Where is your hometown? Current residence? Any personal family information you care to share (children, pets, hobbies, talents etc).

I currently live in Clarkston, Michigan. I do not have children. I have two incredibly lovable cats and I enjoy gardening and playing the piano. I used to be an avid tennis player and hope to return to the game someday.

How/why did you decide to attend Mercy?

My parents presented Mercy as an option to the public schools I had previously attended. It was a difficult choice because I was leaving a junior high where I had participated in many activities and had friends that were developed in early childhood and would be attending a new school where I would not know anyone. It was also 25 minutes from my house and would require carpooling. I went to the open house and was very impressed by all of the opportunities that Mercy had to offer and decided to give it a try. My parents let me know that I could switch back to the Livonia public schools if it did not work out but after the first few months I was completely hooked.

What is your fondest Mercy memory?

It is hard to recall just one memory as there are so many that stand out. I recall a field trip to Wayne State's Medical school cadaver laboratory that was fascinating (part of the Anatomy and Physiology course taught by Ms. Capodilupo). I remember how fun it was to have dinner with teammates before basketball games as we were like one big family. I also have many fond memories of time spent with my best friend Kathy Skupin-Qualy (Landry), studying and laughing and playing basketball. She lived closer to school so I spent many evenings at her house and was treated like family by her parents. Finally, I will never forget the beauty of our graduation ceremony at Meadowbrook, we were all so happy and ready to set the world on fire!

What activities were you involved in as a Mercy student? Favorites?

I played basketball for three years, played softball for four years and ran cross country my senior year. I was also involved in Forensics and had a chorus part in the play "Bye Bye Birdie". I loved the drama department and went to see many plays and rehearsals while waiting for my after school activities to begin.

Was there a favorite teacher, coach or staff member who had a strong, positive impact on your life? How so?

There were many teachers and staff members who impacted my life and it is difficult to single out any one person. I remember being inspired by Ms. Capodilupo, not only because she taught a class that was fascinating and challenging, but because she was also a very strong, scientifically oriented woman. She served as a great role model for my pursuits in college. Sr. Constance stands out because of her love of mathematics and Mr. Scalzi was also a great math teacher and was instrumental in my developing an interest in photography that would grow in future years.

Education/career path after graduating from Mercy?

I went to Stanford thinking I was going to take a pre-med curriculum and then go on to medical school. I decided against this path after observing the cut-throat behavior of my pre-med classmates, which didn't seem to be in line with the future profession they were pursuing. I had always loved mathematics and thought that engineering would build on that passion and provide a more open career path. After a summer internship with the product engineering group at General Motors I decided on Mechanical Engineering. I interned again at General Motors between my junior and senior years, this time in their Advanced Manufacturing Engineering group, and at the start of my senior year I was awarded an academic scholarship that could be used for two years of Stanford tuition. I had not planned on attending graduate school right after undergrad but could not decline a year of tuition so I began pursuing a master's degree in Manufacturing Systems Engineering so that I could complete a master's degree in five years instead of six. I received a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering in 1986 and a Master's Degree in Manufacturing Systems Engineering in 1987.

My first job after graduation in 1987 was with Prime Computer in the budding high tech corridor near Boston. At that time, Prime was evaluating opportunities to heavily invest in the relatively new world of Computer Integrated Manufacturing. Unfortunately Prime did not choose to move into this area and after a year of more or less administrative activities I looked for work that would allow me to use my technical skills as well as provide some overseas travel opportunities. With my older sister's help, I found a job with Comau North America, a division of FIAT, SpA. I was the first women engineer to join Comau and after two years at their North American division in the Detroit area I was reassigned to their headquarters in Torino Italy. It was while I was in Italy that I began providing computer simulation consulting services for various Italian industries and clients including the national Gas and Electric company (ENEL), DaVinci Airport, the Port of Genova and Eli Lilly in Florence. I returned to the states after two years in Italy and started a business unit within the North American division of Comau with the mission of providing computer simulation and manufacturing system consulting services to support the design, development and optimization of automotive manufacturing processes. I purchased this business unit from Comau in 1997 and started Empirical Solutions Corporation (ESC). In addition to automotive manufacturing systems consulting, ESC also provides consulting services to support healthcare, consumer products and non-automotive manufacturing companies.

Most rewarding professional, and/or personal, experience since graduating from Mercy?

One of the most memorable professional experiences I have had was the receipt of a Quality award from FIAT which was presented to me by Giovanni Agnelli at Lingotto in Torino. I also had many wonderful travel experiences while working for Comau and living in Italy, including one to St. Mortiz, where I met my husband. My most rewarding personal experiences have occurred while volunteering at FIRST robotics events. Helping to promote the FIRST mission of inspiring young people to become science and technology leaders and watching as they grow and develop self-confidence, communication and leadership skills is truly amazing!

Why do you give to Mercy?

Because I want other young women to have the opportunities I had and believe strongly in their mission.

What advice would give to future, or current, Mercy Girls, as we look forward to celebrating our 70th anniversary in the 2015-2016?

Take advantage of every resource Mercy has to offer and do not hesitate to ask teachers or staff members for help or support. Embrace the diversity and know that you are part of a special family.