



WILSON & ASSOCIATES

Mari Hess (5/26/1968 – 1/4/2021)
“Fearless”

There are a lot of words one can use to describe a person; for Mari, I can think of caring, thoughtful, sensitive, dedicated, driven and loyal to name a few, but the one word I keep coming back to is “Fearless” and let me explain why in the story of our time together...

Mari Hess was never “afraid” of anything or any challenge that I knew of; she embraced life like few do... Her resume she faxed to me in December, 1993 (it’s still on the original thermal paper fax machines used to use and it’s fading out after all these years) indicated that she had left the comfort of her home base in Northern CA and “fearlessly” traveled across the country to attend college in Findlay, Ohio. I remember when I asked her “why Findlay University?”, she said it was largely because they had an Equine program and she loved working with horses. She also told me it got way colder than she was used to back there and she worried about the horses so much she actually slept in the stables with them a few times; Mari loved animals so much... Mari graduated Findlay with a 4.0 GPA and a BA in Marketing (with coursework in Psychology and Human Relations) and she would soon put all those skills to work in her career. Mari is one of the few people I have met (including myself) that actually completed that transition from college to career in her chosen field of expertise!

As I interviewed Mari (as well as 2 other Industry Veterans many of you would know) for my first hire in the Northern CA market in January of 1994 (1 year in to starting my business), I made some notes that I have also kept over the years, and most of these notes were very positive with one exception that would later be shattered – “Mari was a bit timid and I was concerned about her ability to make presentations to customers”; what was I thinking??? Having seen the positive outweigh this one negative, I consulted my old friend (Randy Wisnoski – Manager of Western Farm Center Distribution) who had recommended Mari to me in the first place since I was fairly new to the Northern CA marketplace; Randy simply said “I have never seen a Demo Rep (Mari had been working as a CS and Demo rep for Nature’s Variety Dog Food) sell product the way she does; she’s a Bulldog”. Many of you have heard me refer to Mari as “my little Bulldog” over the years, now you know where that started... Mari was the only one of the 3 candidates I interviewed that followed up and sent me a Thank you note (I would get countless thank you notes from her over the past 26+ years) for the interview; in it she said “I am ready to take on this challenge, if you are willing to give me a chance”... “Fearless”!

Mari began working with me as my 1st Employee in February, 1994 (after I had saved up for a couple of months so I could afford to pay her) and at 25 years old, she immediately impressed me with her “fearless” attack on the entire territory; she would go anywhere and at any time to help a customer; not

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just to sell them something (this has always been our Company Mantra; find a way to help a customer first, then they will support us with their purchases in the long run). Mari pioneered the Northern CA and Reno markets, working closely with Distributor reps and their retail customers, and her work ethic was quickly noticed by many in her territory (no one had seen anything like her as a MFG Rep) so much so that 2 years into the job, Mari was offered a “more lucrative position selling dog food in a more condensed territory”. Not many 27 years olds would turn down that opportunity and she “Fearlessly” accepted the new challenge, leaving me professionally and with a recommended replacement, who I hired almost immediately. One year later, when the “grass wasn’t greener” and her replacement didn’t work out so well, Mari “Fearlessly” asked if she could re-apply for her old job, and after about a minute to think about it, I said yes of course... Mari spent the next 23 years establishing herself as the Premier MFG Rep in Northern CA/Reno, and when asked by me about 15 years ago, if she would help cover the Salt Lake City region of Utah for us, she “Fearlessly” agreed to that challenge as well. Mari was the epitome of a “Road Warrior” and would drive for hours every day, through horrific Bay Area traffic, all sorts of adverse weather conditions and even fought her way through Natural Disasters (mostly Wildfires) to see the Customers she cared so deeply about. Mari’s expenses were always the highest in our Company, but I seldom even mentioned this because I knew she was going the extra mile (or 200) and working her territory smartly by staying overnight and maximizing her time + she and her customers enjoyed sharing meals together while she was in town; many of these customers became her friends... I saved a letter I received from one of her retail customers (Fort Bragg Feed) in 2001; in it, the Owner stated among other glowing comments “We have always enjoyed a good relationship with Mari; she does far more than is expected of her. She is a valuable asset to your company” (Boy, didn’t I know that!) Wouldn’t we all like that said about us in our workplace or in life in general?

Speaking of life in general, there were so many things I witnessed Mari “fearlessly” try on a personal level; just some of those I recall are:

- Championship Reigning Horse Rider/Competitor (please watch the YouTube video link like over 600 already have). I know Mari even competed in the National Finals at least one year
- Ziplining, Tubing, ATV Tours, Parasailing, Helicopter Tours, Paddleboarding and all sorts of other water sports on our many Sales Conference trips; she would also work hard to compete in our Annual Golf Tournament (my thing; not hers) and I know that if she enjoyed it more than once a year, she would have been good at it naturally!
- Dancing (she loved to Dance!) and Singing; yes, I witnessed her sing Karaoke several times at various trade shows
- World Travels – often she would travel with a friend, but if no one was available to go (as was the case in her last trip to Europe), she would go anyway with a tour of people she never met, and she would make new friends to keep in touch with; that’s “Fearless”!

In every thing Mari tried, she always had the desire to do them to the fullest and be the best at them she could be; she wanted to be a winner and often was!

Mari was also “fearless” in her relationships and loved unconditionally; she wanted nothing more than to be liked, loved and/or cared for the way she did others... My wife (Kim) and I attended Mari’s wedding in Lake Tahoe many years ago, and we both commented to her just how beautiful of a bride she was that day; she look amazing and as healthy as I have ever seen her. My wish would have been that the Cowboy (nothing wrong with Cowboys; just this one!) she married would have truly seen her as the trustworthy, loyal and caring partner she was, and treated her with the respect she deserved; he didn’t!

Mari and I had a Mentor/Protégé' relationship from the start and she would always tell me "I trust you; you have always taken care of us" when I would make difficult business decisions. She always had our Company's best interest at heart (as do all the JWA Team members) and was excited when we would grow as Team and add to her "family". Mari grew very close to her JWA Family, and we are all devastated at her being gone from us. She was also very close with many of our current and even former MFG personnel we have worked with (I have heard from so many this past 24 hours); she spent many hours in cars with them driving all over the territory; always with a plan in mind, and then would enjoy a meal with them and laugh (she had a great laugh) at the silliest things... Her Customers were Kings and Queens to her, and she would do anything for them, at the same time helping Distributor Reps (I have heard from both groups quite a bit today) ; she just really cared for "her people". Our relationship grew to be more of a Father/Daughter type, as we went through many trials together over the years; we always had each other's back! I have told many people over the years that Mari was as loyal to me as any foot soldier in the Army, and she would go to battle and through walls with me or for me at any time or place. That type of loyalty is a shrinking character trait in much of the workplace today, and someone like Mari is just not easy to even think about replacing, but knowing Mari, she would say, "find someone great to take care of my customers and to be a part of my JWA Team"!

Finally, Mari and I had many discussions over the years about Faith, and she and everyone else on our Team knew where I stand and that I believe God puts people in our lives for a reason. Mari struggled with a serious disorder for most of the years we knew her, and everyone closest to her knew it. In speaking with a Therapist Mari worked with at Beyond Hunger today, she also told me what a truly caring and honest person Mari was with her, and that she wished (as I did) that she would have committed to a more serious program for help, but that Mari thought she could handle things and needed to work... As much as I and others respected Mari's work ethic, I wish now she would have heeded the warning signs (and my requests) to slow things down and prioritize her life. **The message here to all of us is, don't ever put your work in front of your health, your family or loved ones!**

We are all flawed in different ways, but if we confess these flaws to the Lord and repent, He will forgive us and be waiting there to greet us in Heaven... The Bible says in Heaven "there will be no more tears, death, mourning or pain; we will never be stressed, exhausted, frustrated, angry or sick because our new bodies will be strong and imperishable"

I can see Mari there now; looking as beautiful as she did on her wedding day; ready to ride the most beautiful horse, and I look forward to our reunion one day! Until that Glorious Day; rest well in peace and a healthy new body Mari.... You are already greatly missed here on Earth!

Love,

Jerry

In memory of Mari, we have donated to these 2 important charities, and we encourage you to read about them as well...

- 1) Beyond Hunger - <http://beyondhunger.org>
- 2) Sonoma Action for Equine Rescue - <https://saferhorse.com>

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