

## Meet Mary Beth Gwynn - July 2011

by Danny Bernstein

Mary Beth Gwynn could be called a renaissance woman, a person who reinvented herself or an active retiree. But forget the labels - Mary Beth is leading a full active life, and at 63, she's not even retired.

Mary Beth grew up in rural South Maryland in the town of Waldorf, then with a population of less than 1,000. Her mother was from a county north of there and never felt like she belonged. Her mother always said that the children would go off to college. Mary Beth was raised Catholic and went to [Spalding College](#) in Louisville, then a Catholic women's college, where she majored in English and Psychology.

She married a guy in the service and moved to Bangkok where she taught English and Psychology in international schools. Though the marriage didn't last too long, this overseas experience was life changing. She changed her approach to life to "I'm willing to try anything."

Her Peace Corp friends advised her to go back to the U.S. "It will be hard to fit in later," they said.

So she did. She got a MS in Library Science and went to work for the Cincinnati Law school library. She married John Saxon, a financial advisor with a brokerage firm. John now works partly in Asheville and partly in Miami.

As a child, she loved to explore the woods and pastures. "That was where I was happiest." She and John moved to Miami where they spent a lot of time in the [Everglades](#). Mary Beth did several Outward Bound trips in the Four Corners area.

She also did soul-searching trips in Durango, Colorado with the [Animas Valley Institute](#). She calls it *Psychology gone wild*. There was fasting, solitary and spiritual time. The group fosters a sense of the wild, like a sacred place.

"That's one of the reasons I hike now."



**How did you decide to settle in Asheville?**

We came to Asheville on a long weekend and bought a house.

We had our children late and I wanted to wait until our last child finished high school. We sold our house in Miami quickly and that gave me a lot of credibility with John. So when I said to him "This is the place. This is where we should move," he was fine with that. We moved in the summer of 2007.

I have two part-time jobs. I'm a hearing reporter for Social Security disability cases. That was Brenda Worley's old part-time job (after she retired from her full-time Social Security job.) She talked me through the job. I set up video conferences, audio and typed index of audio. I make sure it all works.

I also have a practice helping people to use their consciousness. I teach them out to track their energies.

We have two children. Peter is a legislative aide to Sen. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and in charge of health care. Katy just graduated college and will be teaching English in China.

**How did you join CMC?**

I took your course at [College for Seniors](#). [I taught several courses on *Hiking in Western North Carolina*. Several active CMC hikers came out of that course. Danny]

On your last class, you gave out CMC applications and said that you were ready to join CMC.

Hiking is one of the main things I moved here for. Now I carve out my schedule so I have Wednesday free.

I help maintain a section of trail leading up to and down from Mt. Mitchell (about two miles) with my buddies Barbara Morgan and Lee Silver. I think this is our third year. I also lead hikes

**If you were to take a visitor for a hike, where would you take them?**

I love water. I would take them on the East Fork of the Pigeon River.

Mary Beth is an intense urban gardener. She lives on a very small lot in Montford in Asheville but she gardens on her neighbor's land. She has okra, fig trees, and pawpaw trees. In fact, you could consider her a share cropper.

**And I understand that you're a beekeeper?**

I've always wanted to keep bees. It must have been a calling. I now keep bees with a partner on a third person's land under the Chestnut St. Bridge. This woman has a community garden as well.

Our purpose is not so much to gather honey from bees but to strengthen the gene pool. My bee partner and I started this spring. We took a course at the NC Arboretum and got a mentor.

It's like hiking, you learn by doing. It's a small but important part of my life. In season, we'll spend two to three hours a week on bees. We suit up as a precaution. We also bought a child's suit for young guests.

Bees move around in winter to protect the queen. About 80% of the bees will die. The hive is the organism, not the individual bees. You get new bees on a farm, in the mail and in a swarm. We call their hives "girl hives" and painted them beautiful pastel colors. We have about 100,000 bees now in three colorful hives.

Bees are now part of Mary Beth's spiritual life and her connection with nature, just like hiking.