



KATHY HARRISON

Behind the camera



Kathy Harrison loves to be behind the camera ... shooting photographs of people, animals, landscapes, architecture. In fact, she rarely leaves home without her Canon Rebel XSi and the Tamron 28300 lens because she doesn't want to miss an opportunity to capture a special image, a perfect moment.

KATHY HARRISON

and in Front of the Camera

By Beth Foreman, Features Editor

But since the summer of 2010, when Kathy Harrison's husband, Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, was elected the 13th president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, she's had to get used to being in front of the camera.

"I've been in the spotlight a little more since his election, which is a growing experience for me because I really prefer to be in the background, behind the camera," Kathy said as she sat comfortably on her backyard deck — framed by a banana tree that she takes inside every winter — smiling into her laptop camera as we chatted on Skype.

When asked about her role as Synod's "First Lady," Kathy replied, "As far as my role, it's still the same. I don't really see myself as a 'First Lady.' I see myself as who I've always been, and that's Matt's wife, my boys' mother, a daughter, a sister. My vocations."

She smiled and excused herself to chat for a moment with a contractor who had just shown up. "Hi!" she shouted to someone in the yard. "Are you here for the windows?"

Laughter, dogs barking, birds chirping.

"Sorry about that," she said, sipping on her lime water and returning to her computer camera. "We're putting in a couple of egress windows in the basement and workers are coming over. This is a typical day in my life." Kathy waved her hands as if directing a symphony and laughed. Gracefully and joyfully, she juggles day-to-day activities as a wife whose husband travels often and a mother with two active teenage sons, Matthew, an 18-year-old high school senior, and Mark, a 16-year-old sophomore. Rounding out the family are two dogs and a cat, "the fewest number of pets we've ever had!"



"I shot this one in the cemetery in Buenos Aires called La Recoleta, where Eva Perón is buried. There are rows and rows of crypts and beautiful statuary. I took a picture of a mother, with one child at her breast and another one standing next to her. It was just such a beautiful image of motherhood. It's one of my favorite pictures."

"I'm so thankful that I've been able to be a stay-at-home mom, especially at this time, because it gives me the opportunity to have a home that's open to my sons' friends."

"My oldest son is the socialite, always gotta be with friends and talkin'," Kathy explained. "He'll come home and say, 'Oh, by the way, Mom, can four guys sleep over tonight?' He takes after my husband!"

Without blinking, Kathy opens her home. "Their friends feel like our home is a safe place where they can talk," she said.

Like so many mothers whose children are growing faster than they ever imagined, Kathy reflected, "I can't believe that Matthew is going to be graduating and leaving. I'm gonna cry!" But the empty nest might bring the opportunity for Kathy to travel more with her husband. "Matt would like me to travel more with him. That's something I'm looking forward to doing."

Giving us a glimpse into what makes her tick, Kathy described her younger son Mark, or "Markie," as she calls him. "He's more like me. Independent, happy to do his own thing, happy to be with people, but he doesn't need to be with people all the time. And he has that dry sense of humor," she added.

"When he was in kindergarten, I was being silly, waking him up one morning, pretending I was the dog, panting." She mimicked a panting dog as she continued her story. "He opened his eyes and said, 'Mom, you have opposable thumbs!'"

There is a sparkle in Kathy's eyes as she shared stories about her family and her life in Christ.

"I'm actually a very shy introvert," she explained, although she is relaxed and animated as she chats in front of the computer camera. "Sometimes it's a challenge for me to reach out." She paused as she considered her "wall."

"We all have things that prevent us from reaching out to other people." However, in her vocations as wife and mother, "things naturally occur. I have opportunities every day, whether it's talking to the boys' friends, the electrician, the contractor, or my hairdresser. It's not like I go out and find the opportunities. God drops them in my lap."

Kathy acknowledged the pressures we all face in our fast-paced society. "It's easy to feel guilty that we're not doing more, we're not witnessing more, we're not out there more. And it's true, under the Law, we are totally guilty." Her voice slowed as she emphasized this point.

"We can never do enough. We can never help our neighbor enough. We can never love them enough." *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23).

But she was quick to change direction, and her eyes lit up as she continued, "But that's what makes the Gospel so sweet! The Gospel comes to us and says, 'You are forgiven!'" *You are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* (Romans 3:24–25 ESV).

Here is the heart of Kathy's encouragement for others. "The Gospel gives us this immense calmness and freedom to be who we are, where we are, whatever our vocations as a redeemed child of God."

Then she leaned toward the computer camera and shared as if chatting with a dear friend. "Embrace who you are,

"Embrace who you are, where you are. You are a sinner, forgiven by Christ. And this is so we can go out and serve our neighbor. It's not because we have to or because we feel guilty."

where you are. You are a sinner, forgiven by Christ. And this is so we can go out and serve our neighbor. It's not because we have to or because we *feel* guilty."

She offered an example. "Maybe you're a mother with young children and you never get out and see anybody else because you are so busy at home. Embrace that, recognizing that under the Law, we are all guilty of not doing enough, but under the Gospel, we are free! It's the mundane day-to-day interactions with people. Whether it's a mother changing her child's diaper or wiping her son's nose or helping him work through a break-up or whatever. *This is day-to-day witnessing*," doing these things in the name of Jesus — the only Way, Truth, and Life — and proclaiming that saving message in words, along with our actions.

So going beyond the walls, the walls of our lives, our homes, and our communities to share the love of Christ isn't always about applying for a passport and flying to a remote part of the world?



"That's right. Reaching outside the walls is oftentimes reaching out to those closest to us, sharing the love of Christ in word and deed with those nearest us."

Indeed, Kathy's earliest memory is watching her own mother share her faith. "She would read Bible stories to me every night and then talk about what Jesus had done for us. This is such a constant wonderful memory for me. Matt and I have tried to carry this on with our boys. It's a blessing to have the opportunity to share Christ on an intimate level like that."

Kathy Schimm grew up in Sioux City, Iowa, with two sisters and one brother. She attended the University of Iowa to study fashion merchandising, but when she came home for her freshman year Thanksgiving break, she met Matthew Harrison, still a high school senior. "At first I thought, hmmm . . . he's kind of young and immature. But he has a lot of potential," she said with a chuckle.

They dated for eighteen months, were married in July 1981, and Kathy trans-

ferred to Morningside College where Matt was on a football scholarship. Kathy graduated with a B.S. in Psychology and Business, but one of her first jobs was a one-year mission trip with Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots. She and her husband served in Deer Lake, a remote Cree village in Northwest Ontario. The village was about 120 miles past the end of the road, so the only way to get there was to fly in on a little Cessna. "In the winter, we flew in on skis and in the summer we flew in on floats."

Being outside the walls of a comfortable, midwestern life didn't shake Kathy's focus on serving joyfully in settings that might make others a little uncomfortable. "We'd have to take our toilet seat and roll of toilet paper and go across the road into the outhouse!" She laughed as she remembered this daily activity.

When they returned to the States, they moved to Fort Wayne where her husband attended the seminary. In his second year at the seminary, he participated in an exchange program

us to be able to say 'no' to some things so we can say 'yes' to other things."

She loves to say "yes" to her gardening. "Every year I'm expanding my gardens. I'll go to the local store and find things that are on clearance because they are half dead, and then I'll bring them back to life and plant them. I bring about 25 plants or trees inside for the winter. My banana tree, fig tree, lime tree. It gets like a jungle! I have bird feeders, an apple tree, a cherry tree, a blueberry bush, rhubarb . . ."

She turned to look around her garden. "I can raise everything except vegetables," she laughed. "Do you think I can raise a decent-tasting tomato? I have tried for ten years. I've tried the upside-down tomatoes. I've tried the potted tomatoes. I've tried in-the-ground tomatoes. I've tried hybrids. It just doesn't work for me," she sighed. She's figured out she's not so good at tomato growing, but that just gives someone else the opportunity to serve her. "I go to the farmer's market and get a fresh tomato from someone who is good at growing tomatoes!"

Living in a community, sharing life together.

Kathy recognizes the LWML as a beautiful illustration of a community, women and men working together. "I've witnessed the work of LWML in many congregations and the wonderful projects they support here in the States and overseas with their mites. When Matt travels, he gets to see first-hand what the mites do for people around the world. It's such an amazing blessing."

Holding up a purple Bible to the camera, Kathy said, "By the way, I love my LWML Bible, a gift to me at the last convention. I use it, love it, mark it up. Thank you!"

Then Kathy opened her Bible to read her confirmation verse, a beautiful illustration of the fact that no walls can come between Christ and us:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,



Newly married, just out of college, city girl. Kathy headed outside some really big walls. "We lived in a dilapidated one-room cabin. But we put on a new old door and wrapped plastic around the building to insulate it better. We put in a new tin stove and our refrigerator was a box in the floor." She added, "Oh, and we had no electricity or plumbing. We cooked on a little two-burner Coleman stove. I did the wash in a bucket with a washboard and got our water from the lake."

Kathy's memories of the people and the ministry are fond ones. "It was an incredible experience, living with the people, learning from them and sharing with them. I wanted to stay. The people have such a good sense of humor. And they live as a community, sharing what they have."

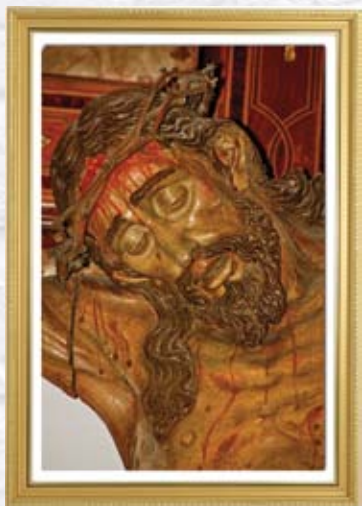
in South Australia where they spent one year. They returned to the States, and Rev. Harrison served his vicarage in Texas, and then headed back to Fort Wayne for one more year before his first call to rural Iowa. After five years, they went to inner city Fort Wayne, and then five years later, he was called to St. Louis, which has been home for the past 11 years.

Embracing who she is and where she is at each moment, Kathy sees her role as keeping her home and her family running smoothly. "It's my community. Sometimes we women feel we have to do it all. We have to work a full-time job. Our homes have to be perfect. We have to be involved in everything at church. We are spread so thin, thinking we need to be doing more and more and more. That's why living under the Gospel is so wonderful because it frees

or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35–39 ESV).

"I read this and it gives me goose bumps every time because it's just such a powerful statement. When Christ was hanging on the cross, nailed to the cross, bruised and beaten and bloody, I'm sure he wasn't feeling real warm and fuzzy. It was a true act of His will for us because of His love for us. That love flows through the cross and through the chalice and then through our response to this good news as works of mercy to our neighbor so that they too can see and know their and our crucified, risen, ascended, and returning Savior."

A photograph, one of Kathy's own shots, reminds her of this perfect love. "I shot this one in a church in Argentina.



It's one of the most beautiful crucifixes I've ever seen. Everything flows from the cross. That's where we find our strength and the ability to forgive others."

Kathy, child of God: mother, wife, gardener, photographer . . . and sometimes she'll even step in front of the camera to share her story, to share His story. *Q*

MORE FROM KATHY...

What might readers be surprised to know about you?

I'm adventurous! My husband and I went scuba diving in the Great Barrier Reef, but I had to talk him into it because when we got to Australia and were set to take diving lessons, the front page article said, "Shark Bites Man in Half!" Matt asked if I still wanted to go diving. And I said — yeah! When we were diving, I saw a reef shark, and being the adventurous person I am, I started swimming after it, trying to catch it, and my husband is motioning me to come back! The shark was so beautiful and graceful.

Was I scared? Nah. I touched the head of a moray eel when we were in Kenya, and I got my picture taken cheek-to-cheek with a cheetah that was being rehabilitated to go back into the wild.

Oh, and I was held up at gunpoint when I worked at a bank in Australia!

Gunpoint?! Tell us that story!

Well, I was working as a teller in Australia, and this guy came in and pointed a gun at my head asking for money. He was less than an arm's length away. I started throwing money into his bag, dropping it on the floor and picking it up and throwing it. He just kept saying, "More! More!" Finally I said, "I don't have any more." Then he just turned and got away on a bicycle. The whole time he's standing there with his gun pointed at my head, all I could think was that if the gun goes off, it's going to be such a mess. That's all I could think about! It's going to be one big mess.

The police tried to chase him on horseback, but it was raining, so they couldn't catch him. I actually came back to work the next day, got back on the horse, you know. I was fine until a week later when I was helping a customer and someone came up to her side and asked me a question. It was the same scenario, and I fell apart, crying. After that, any time I would see a gun pointed at the camera on TV, I had to look away.

After the holdup, I told my family that we needed to pray for this person. He may not have any other Christian influence in his life. I don't know how our prayers will help him but maybe someone will come into his life and have an influence on him.

How would your friends and family describe you?

"That's a hard one!" Kathy paused to consider. "Caring and a little crazy! I like to have fun. We have a lot of laughs in our family. We like to dance. It's in my genes! When the kids' friends are over, playing their music, and maybe it's music I'm not so crazy about, but I'll start dancin' and groovin'. And they'll say, 'Mom, stop, stop!' And I'll say, 'Oh no! This is really fun!'" As Kathy tells the story, she starts dancing in her patio chair. "And I get them up dancin', just joking around, being silly. We have a fun time!"

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How do you begin your days?

After I get the boys off to school, I sit on my deck and do a little reading or correspondence. I'm trying to be more consistent with my Bible study, prayer, and devotions at that time. As with everything in my life, it's a bit hit and miss!

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Searching for treasures for my yard at antique and second-hand stores. I found a birdbath at one thrift store for \$20. I went online and it's worth about \$700! It's always fun when I come across some really great treasure like that!

What's the most beautiful place you've ever visited?

I've been very blessed to travel with my husband over the years. The place that probably captured my heart more than any other would be Kenya. There is just something about that place . . . even now when I think about it, I feel my heart tugging out of my chest, wanting to be on the mission field there. It's such an amazing country. I absolutely love it.

With Matt's travel schedule, it was a blessing to be able to do this trip as a family in 2006. We were together 24/7 for five weeks, literally on top of each other, jostling around in cars on those suicidal roads, trying to avoid other cars in our lane coming at us and cows and pigs and people walking and potholes. We went on safari, a photographic adventure. Incredible! We saw elephants up close, giraffe, zebra, a wildebeest migration, baboons up close, and hippos and crocodiles and cheetahs. It was just amazing. The people were so welcoming in Kenya, especially among the Lutheran community. There is such great need there, and it's a country that's so rich in natural resources for such a poor country. I just fell in love with the people and the country.