

COMING TO AMERICA

Buffet Luncheon With a Lesson in Courage

By
Kathy Garfinkle

Members and guests were treated to a memorable buffet luncheon and Women's History program on Saturday, March 24 2018 at the Fremont Adult School multi-use room. The popular annual event was sold out. Kathy Bray greeted everyone at the registration table. Flowers at every table added a lovely festive touch. Meet and greet time offered a great opportunity to mix and enjoy the company of all those attending. Judy Huff did an outstanding job as the MC for the afternoon event. She really kept the buffet lines moving along without congestion! The delicious buffet featured a variety of salads and yummy desserts.

After years of research and work by Shirley Gilbert on her book "Coming to America," Shirley was persuaded to write a script and share the story of Marianne Strong at our 2018 Women's History program. She did a stellar job of bringing the story to life. Her presentation was professional and, thanks to drama coach Sandy Cashmark, delivered with dramatic flair.

The program opened with the inspiring "Coming To America" by Neil Diamond reminding us that we are a nation of immigrants. The story of Marianne Strong and her memorable journey as a refugee from Budapest to a new life in America is a story of strength and determination. In 1956 Marianne was a 21-year-old elementary Kindergarten teacher. She made the spur of the moment decision to flee Budapest for a life free of Communism. She left at 3 a.m. with only the clothes on her back. After a terrifying journey, she was finally safe in Austria. The Austrians were very kind and they allowed Marianne and the other refugees to travel by train free of charge to Vienna. A Hungarian man who was also sponsoring his two sons to come to America sponsored Marianne. Thus began her new life in Pittsburgh.

After her story was told, Marianne agreed to be interviewed on stage. Shirley asked a number of questions and took questions from the audience. She asked why a 21-year-old young lady in Budapest whose life wasn't so difficult under communism would consider leaving her home and family. "WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!" Marianne responded that she wasn't thinking. She was just going on instinct. The Fodor family that she lived with when she first moved to Pittsburgh treated Marianne very poorly. Shirley asked if Marianne ever wanted to go back home to Budapest. Marianne firmly answered that she never looked back. "In Hungary the government chose for me and I wanted to choose for myself," Marianne replied. With courage and tenacity Marianne created a rich and fulfilling life here in America. She lives in Fremont with her husband Evan. They have three children and six grandchildren.

Thank you to Janice Longo, Liz Poe and their committee for their remarkable skill and hard work in presenting another amazing Women's History Program. Thank you to Shirley Gilbert for sharing the life of Marianne Strong with us all.