

Marie Galanti—“Our French Connection”

Over the last five years, I’ve consulted with and referred clients to Marie Galanti when I’ve had to deal with estate planning issues related to international law. Lurking in the back of my mind each time I contacted her: “Now this looks like an interesting person to interview and write about!”

I made arrangements to meet during lunch at Marie’s office on Fourth Street in Santa Rosa. I arrived a little early and, upon entering the conference room, immediately relaxed in the soothing ambiance – Asian prints and artifacts and wonderfully worn Turkish carpets.

When Marie entered the room, it took on a new, vibrant energy. We settled in with our sandwiches and salad, and before long, I learned the amazing range of Marie’s professional and personal experiences: successful international law practitioner, former resident of Europe and South America, college professor, publisher of one of the most popular French publications, member of a French cultural organization, and a volunteer for the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA).

Born in Quebec, Marie’s first language is French. This may well have been the first building block to an international law career. However, Marie didn’t go to law school until “late in life,” graduating from Golden Gate Law School in 2002. There were other building blocks that eventually led to her present career.

With a doctorate in French civilization, she taught at San Francisco State at the same time she became a co-owner of France Press, which published *Journal Français*. Marie described it as “an old community newspaper going back to the Gold Rush days.” It had a dying readership, and Marie took over publication, resurrecting it by including “political commentary, social trends, and history features.” It circulated nationwide with a readership of 25,000.

In 2000, the company had received a proposal from a large French publisher to buy *Journal Français*, which could have ended Marie’s role as publisher. She decided to sell the newspaper and go to law school.

What remained after the sale of her newspaper were Marie’s French connections, which resulted in “almost instantly” having plenty of work to do when she started her law practice.

Marie described her law practice as “concentrating on international aspects of estate planning and international private transactions.” She added, “The interesting part is to identify lawyers (known as notaries in civil code countries like France) with whom I can work.”

Marie’s friend of 20 years, Deborah Lee, who practices law in Sebastopol, and was company counsel for France Press, described her as “one of the best known members of the Bay Area’s Francophile community, owing to her native fluency in French, doctorate in French Civilization, work as a publisher, and many friends and business contacts here and abroad. As her company’s counsel, I quickly discovered that she is a fast study, entrepreneurial, culturally and politically sophisticated, witty, and very smart.”



Marie in her office

Marie’s law practice isn’t limited to international estate planning issues. She’s also become proficient at handling more conventional planning and administration. Lee went on to say, “Because of her competence and no-nonsense professionalism, Marie is my ‘go to’ person for estate planning and estate administration matters, including my own plan. She is the first practitioner to whom I refer clients for estate planning advice and estate administration.” Marie said “Estate planning is a little difficult for most people,” so one of

her goals is to help them relax. She has gone to her clients’ homes and even had a two-year old child sitting on her lap while she took notes.

While waiting for the bar results in 2003, Marie volunteered at the CRLA as a staff attorney and “loved every minute of it.” She worked closely with Nancy Palandati, who currently practices in Guerneville. Nancy said, “Marie was absolutely wonderful with clients. All of our clients were very low income and the overwhelming majority had little or no experience with the civil legal system. We had nothing but lavish praise from clients. She was compassionate, patient and proved an effective negotiator – she became our go-to person for debt collection matters.” After Marie passed the bar, she was offered a paid position on the CRLA staff, but found it too demanding “to have five clients lined up waiting for me.” She still does volunteer work for CLRA.

As the building blocks of her legal career were stacking up, Marie continued active involvement in the French cultural organization, Alliance Française. At the organization’s meetings, she gives lectures on topics related to French law. This

January, she gave a talk in Santa Rosa about the evolution of women's rights in France, "The Rocky Road to Egalité." In other venues, Marie lectures on the civil code, also known as the Napoleonic code, Anglo-Saxon common law procedures, Islamic law, known as Sharia, and Buddhist law.

Marie still has family in Canada: two brothers and a mother, 97, who has Alzheimer's and a sense of humor, who lives in Quebec City. Marie described Quebec City as a little larger than Santa Rosa, "provincial, quaint, and full of 18th century architecture."

Marie and her partner live in the eastern part of Santa Rosa. She commented that their home, a "large, rambly ranch style on an acre with fruit trees" has "very good vibes," perhaps because it was previously occupied by the "Guiding Light" commune.

Marie maintains an apartment in San Francisco and practices law there one day a week. She enjoys the city's energy in the

business arena and the cultural scene. However, she has observed over the last decade an "increase in the degree of sophistication" here in Sonoma County. She mentioned the new concert hall, the Green Center at Sonoma State University, as an example.

When I take a step back and look at Marie's astonishing success as a relatively new lawyer with a specialty in international law, I decided that it was one part serendipity - born where French is spoken - and nine parts tenacity - working hard at everything she does. Oh, and maybe the good vibes in her home left by the "Guiding Light" has something to do with it! ¶¶

By Gail Jonas

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Circuit Court of Appeals held in its lower court decision in *Heller* that the private use of arms is not only "...for activities such as hunting and self-defense, ... [but also to protect individuals from] ... the depredations of a tyrannical government (or a threat from abroad)." Okay, so back in 1789 you had to be careful before you allowed a strong central government to take over—you still do.

But there are two differences between 1789 and today. First, the advance of weaponry has gone so utterly beyond the "equality" that muskets and cannons can achieve, that we are simply not in the same quantum of self-defense today. Nobody today seriously thinks citizens should be allowed to bear arms of mass destruction in order to protect themselves "...from the depredations of a tyrannical government..."

We also have a second and perhaps greater difference. We have "...long endured," as Abraham Lincoln expressed in the Gettysburg Address. The "Great Experiment" of democracy has just had its 57th consecutive peaceful transition of power. In 1789, when a fledgling nation was about to surrender power and control to a central government, you had a situation that warranted greater concern about risking a repeat of the "...depredations of a tyrannical government..."

In over 200 years of self-governance under one Constitution

with a handful of subsequent amendments, we have demonstrated that our greatest defense against tyranny is not the musket, but the law.

I do not for a minute believe we should rest on our laurels, but I do believe that our best defense against tyranny is trying to ensure our laws are fair and just, and to insist on the respect of our courts and police, and above all else, find some moral and ethical common ground as a people.

If you want to ban more guns of a certain type, I can live with that. What I am really having more difficulty with is the apparent lack of public outcry against the violent video games, or against the entertainment industry for glamorizing the use of these weapons, or even the horror of young children not being taught to value the worth of their fellow classmates, when they are weaker and easily preyed-upon.

There is no excuse for what happened at Sandy Hook, no matter how brutalized someone may have felt they were. But at the end of the day, we will save more lives with kindness and moral decency than we ever will with gun control. ¶¶

[Editors' Note: Recognizing that there are going to be other opinions, the Bar Journal invites those who want to voice an opposing opinion to do so. This publication will accommodate divergent views].