

Mary Bolich

Principal/Creative Writer at Red Rabbit Creative
Member Since 2019

Mary Bolich's passions run deep and she nurtures many interests, but she is most passionate about people. As a longtime writer and chief author/editor of Rotary People of Action profiles, Mary expertly shines the spotlight on others.

"I love getting to know people; learning what makes them tick. I'm so inspired by the caliber of people in our club and it's such an honor to share their stories."

An introvert in a club of big personalities, Mary possesses calm confidence and an admirable well of self-knowledge. Throughout her life, she has identified her passions and pursued them to a high level of excellence.

"I've always had the mindset that I could do anything. It often wasn't true but it's been a good way to approach life."

Mary grew up as one of five children in the small town of Wautoma, Wisconsin.

"I had four brothers...probably why I'm a good runner," she joked.

Her father, a biology teacher, and her mother, a dental hygienist, kept a hobby farm with a menagerie ranging from cows, bees and chickens to albino rats and orphaned baby owls. Mary loves animals to this day, especially the shy crows she tries to befriend at her vacation home in central Wisconsin.

Mary's passion for the written word was also sparked at an early age.

"My childhood was pretty lonely. I spent a lot of time exploring the outdoors and reading."



Mary began writing poetry, entering speech contests and tackling classic novels to read before college from a list provided by a beloved English teacher. By her junior year, she knew she wanted to be a writer.

Mary attended the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh where she studied journalism and ran on the track and cross country teams. After graduation, she was hired as the editor of the weekly newspaper in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, an experience she describes as "baptism by fire."



“It was a lot of responsibility for a 22 year old. I wrote news and in-depth feature stories, an op/ed column, did photography and editing and even laid out the newspaper. A typical day had me interviewing a lumberjack in the forest in the morning, covering the county fair in the afternoon and photographing a Ho-Chunk pow-wow in the evening. I discovered that people love having their story shared. It’s like a gift you give them—capturing who they are.”

Next, Mary took a position as editor of the newspaper in Columbus, Wisconsin, a move that led a prominent local businessman to encourage her to join the Rotary Club. In doing so, she became one of the first women Rotarians in Wisconsin.

“I probably didn’t recognize or appreciate the significance of it at the time. Being the sole woman in the club didn’t faze me, because I was the only woman in a lot of settings.”



In the early 1990s, Mary shifted from journalism to copywriting and loved it immediately.

“I like to express a lot in as few words as possible. It’s like a puzzle.”

Mary’s time as lead creative writer for Kohler Co., where she wrote award-winning ad copy, is one of her proudest professional achievements. Recognized throughout the company as part of a creative “Dream Team,” she partnered with an accomplished artist on myriad campaigns.

“I’d have to create a poem about a sink, write generator brochure copy, headlines for spa ads, a furniture tagline—it was such variety of advertising mediums across a wide range of businesses. I loved it.”



Early in her career, Mary earned a direct commission as a public affairs officer in the Navy Reserve and served for 10 years. She was selected as a NATO media analyst for Operation Joint Endeavor (Bosnia). While stationed in London, Mary bumped into “Harry from Philly,” a Navy pilot, as the two headed out for a run in Hyde Park. Three weeks later, she asked him to marry her.

The couple settled in Plymouth, Wisconsin, where they raised Gregory, Elizabeth and Sophie. All three inherited the running bug and the family enjoys training and racing together—5ks to ultra-marathons. Winner of the 1989 Lakefront Marathon, Mary has run more than 100 marathons as a sub-elite open and masters runner, qualifying for elite starts at Boston, Chicago and other races.

“I love running—being outdoors, the solitude, how relaxing it is and that it spills over into every aspect of life. It’s also a great way to see the world.”

Mary and Harry moved to Milwaukee in 2018. These days, Mary focuses mostly on pro-bono writing, offering her services to organizations she volunteers with. She is especially invested in her work as a reading tutor for Forward Scholars.

“It’s the most gratifying volunteer work I’ve ever done. To have such a measurable impact on kids—I’ve never felt so good about doing something.”

Editor’s Note: *Rotary People of Action* is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Elizabeth Evans Draper