

## Mary Radnofsky



At age 58, Dr. Mary Radnofsky jumped out of a plane for the first time to get the experience of flying through space. She is also a scuba-diver, and loves the weightlessness and beauty of life down deep in the ocean. So much so that she often went diving while living in Hawaii.

With a broad background in liberal arts, fine arts, social sciences, and natural sciences, Mary has been a lifelong learner, explorer, and teacher. She has a good cognitive reserve, so she enjoys discussions on a wide array of topics, from sewing to quantum physics. She coordinated interdisciplinary education projects with sister cities, and travelled, living in Europe and West Africa, where she was librarian at the French Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia.

Mary is a former college professor of Education and Human Development, French, and Astronomy, who taught at Georgetown, Vanderbilt, the University of Maryland, and through the Socrates Institute, a non-profit education organization she founded and led for twenty years. Her teaching and publishing are in Interdisciplinary Studies, Education, Human Rights, Astronomy, French, Sociolinguistics, Qualitative Research, and Oral History.

She has also ghostwritten books in psychology, religion, science, and the 9/11/2001 attacks. And she's an amateur photographer, having printed photos in her own darkroom for many years.

Though originally misdiagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, she was later found to have a rare kind of Leukodystrophy. She has since raised awareness of the rights of people with degenerative brain diseases, by speaking and writing about her personal journey.

"We can still function in society and we can still give," Mary says. "There's a lot of fear and stigma attached to the diagnosis, a lot of very negative vocabulary, and stereotypes. Everyone assumes you're in the final stages. Yet very clearly, people get it in their 40s & 50s. We look pretty normal, and can still function. It takes more prep for us to get things accomplished, but we can still do a lot of things with friends and family."

In 2016, she became the first advocate with dementia to address the United Nations in New York, at the Conference of States Parties, regarding the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She spoke again at the UN in Geneva about people with dementia as having the right to receive “cognitive rehabilitation.”

Mary is the daughter of the late Dr. Matthew I. Radnofsky, Ph.D., a B-17 navigator who was shot down over Germany, parachuted to safety, and then became a POW. After the war, he became scientist and engineer at NASA, designing the first space suits for Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo. Later a college professor, he died at age 68. Her late mother, Eunice Eisenberg Radnofsky was self-taught in art and music and played piano and organ. She started a public library, ran a stamp collecting business, and encouraged Mary to write, giving her a diary at age 4.

She made the first journal entries herself as Mary dictated the day’s events. Thousands of pages later, Mary’s journals are an important touchstone to her life. Eunice died at age 85, after living with dementia for over seven years.

Mary currently serves as ambassador at the Spark!Lab, at the Smithsonian Museum of American History. She will continue to write poetry, stories, and policy statements as long as possible.