A woman with a plan

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MISSOULA--

Mavis Lorenz has been setting goals for herself all her life.

One of her earliest goals—to become a teacher—was firmly fixed by the time she reached seventh grade, but she hadn't decided what kind. Then, motivated by the example of a remarkable physical education teacher, she made up her mind in high school that she, too, would teach physical education. She has been doing that, along with an incredible number of other things, at the University of Montana since 1954.

The path leading to a place on the UM faculty and widespread recognition in her field was not without obstacles, but Mavis Lorenz enjoys challenges.

After graduating from high school in a small farming community in Wisconsin at the tail end of the Depression, she worked in a factory for a year to earn enough to enter Wisconsin State College.

Four years later, armed with a bachelor's degree, she was ready to start teaching. By the time she had taught in Wisconsin public schools for four years, she had another goal in mind. She had decided to get into teacher education. To do this, she would need a master's degree, so that was the next (over)
"WOMAN" -- add one

item on her agenda. She applied for and got a teaching assistantship at the University of Washington, Seattle, where her love for the Northwest was born.

"When I received the M.S. in 1954, I knew I didn't ever again want to live farther east than Montana," she says, "so when the University of Montana offered me a job, I accepted. I've never regretted it."

At the UM she started a swimming program for women and coached the Aqua-maids, a University group well remembered for spectacular water ballets in the 1950s.

She also inherited the UM ski-instruction program and still directs it. This program has grown from one afternoon a week of Alpine skiing to a five-day-a-week schedule involving some 26 student instructors of both Alpine and Nordic skiing.

"The Nordic program, started six or seven years ago, grew to the point that one person just couldn't handle it and the Alpine program too," Lorenz says. "Fortunately, we were able to enlist the aid of the Campus Recreation Department, whose outdoor adventure expert, Dudley Improta, has taken on the Nordic instruction."

According to Brian Sharkey, chairman of the UM Department of Health and Physical Education, Lorenz still has primary responsibility for the University's ski program even though part of the instruction has been delegated to Improta.

He noted that "Mavis is one of the two persons in the Rocky Mountain Division of the Professional Ski Instructors of America who are fully certified by that organization in both Alpine and Nordic instruction."

It is obvious that Sharkey has great admiration for the dynamic associate professor on his faculty whose zest for life keeps getting her involved in high-risk hobbies.

(more)
WOMAN” -- add two

She says she came late to many of her hobbies because they were too expensive for her at the outset of her teaching career. After 40, she earned a commercial pilot’s license, took up mountain climbing and, just last summer, turned an old love of canoeing into a new passion for kayaking.

This winter, to fulfill a goal set last spring, she will make her first attempt at a full ski marathon—50 kilometers, or roughly 30 miles.

Flirting with danger is a way of life for Mavis Lorenz, though she denies that the things she does are any more hazardous than driving a car. This might be disputed.

For example, two weeks after her first venture in kayaking, on the French-town Pond last summer, she went down the Alberton Gorge, which she admits is “a very respectable stretch of white water, comparable to all but the big rivers.” She hopes to have learned enough in the next two or three seasons to be able to teach the University's beginning course in kayaking.

When she has mastered kayaking, who knows what challenge she will take on? Already she is talking about things she wants to do after retirement: sign up for math courses at the University, learn to play the piano, study a foreign language.

"I say I believe in reincarnation because there just isn't time to do it all the first time around," says the woman who has done more of it than an ordinary person could do in several lifetimes. "You hear people say they want to come back as eagles or lions, but I'm having such a ball that I want to come back as me to do the things I missed this time."

Because she is goal-oriented, she does make plans for the future; but she is also fervently engaged in the here and now. She says she is enjoying teaching this year more than ever before.

(over)
"I don't think I'm getting mellow; I think students are getting better. Maybe the glut of teachers in the job market in recent years has scared off all but those who were born to teach, the ones who care deeply about people."

Her eyes light up when she talks about her teacher-training classes, which prepare physical education teachers for elementary schools. She says that since she started teaching, the focus has shifted from the subject matter to the child. The emphasis now is more on developing a well-rounded human being than a dazzling basketball or volleyball player.

"I believe that the elementary teacher should train children in good basic movement and make them adept at handling all kinds of sports equipment," she says. "Then, a junior-high or high-school coach can build on this foundation and turn the products of a sound elementary program into star athletes."

"But," she adds, "no teacher, at any level, should ever forget that he or she is teaching people, not gymnastics or volleyball. The sports are the media; the students are the first concern."

One former student who was influenced by her philosophy is Harley Lewis, UM athletic director, who commented, "Having known Mavis from the perspectives of both student and colleague, I would rate her as one of the best people I've been associated with in physical education. She does an outstanding job in the classroom, and she has had particular success in preparing the University's physical education graduates to do an excellent job in elementary schools."

Turning out teachers who will do an excellent job is a top priority for Mavis Lorenz. Her dedication to her profession and her students comes through in any conversation with her. That and her sense of direction and purpose. Her life has been and will continue to be a series of goals set and attained. But being serious about goals doesn't mean she can't have a marvelous time pursuing them.

(more)
"WOMAN" -- add four

"This interview sounds as if all I do is play," she said, "but I really can't tell where my work ends and my play begins because they are so intermingled. A colleague recently remarked to me, 'All you do all winter is ski, you lucky person.' I replied, 'Luck, hell. I planned it that way 30 years ago.'"

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