

# PANDEMIC PUTS EMERITUS PROFESSOR IN AN UNEXPECTED PLACE

**Larry Marsh didn't plan to go back into the classroom after retiring from UCI BioSci. But then the pandemic struck, and the retired emeritus professor from the Department of Developmental and Cell Biology found himself once again facing students. This time, though, the learners were his four small grandchildren.**

At 8:15 a.m. every weekday from last September until late this spring, Professor Marsh's son and daughter would drive to his Newport Beach home to drop off their youngsters before going to work. Their son has a second-grader and twins in first grade, and their daughter's child is a preschooler.



Professor Marsh and his wife, Jamie, would get their grandchildren settled in and logged on at 8:30 a.m., working from three classroom spaces they set up in their dining room and office. The Marshes would help the kids with their learning until 4 p.m., when their parents returned. The fact Jamie Marsh spent her career as a first-grade teacher aided the pair immeasurably, “and gave me a real appreciation of how hard her work was,” Professor Marsh said.

While pitching in to assist his grandchildren was unexpected, the experience was meaningful. “This was a rare opportunity to spend time with them. We watched a couple of them go from pre-reading to reading on their own and being excited about it.”

The difference between instructing elementary learners and college students was noticeable. “When you teach university students, they write the information down,” Professor Marsh said. “A small child will ask ‘Why?’ and answering that question isn’t always easy. Teaching molecular genetics is easier than explaining phonics to a first-grader. There are so many rule violations, it’s crazy.”

Professor Marsh retired from BioSci in 2017 and quickly began a host of activities. He and his wife became master gardeners, and they now grow citrus fruit, avocados, apricots, apples, blueberries, onions, tomatoes, cauliflower and more in their backyard. The pair also spent time camping in the Southwest and skiing, hiking and fishing in the Sierras, where they have a second home. When the pandemic reined in their activities, helping the grandchildren with school provided adventure of a different sort.

“I thought we would be a little bored sitting at home, but wow, we were exhausted,” he said. “But it was great.”

During his career at BioSci, Professor Marsh investigated the mechanisms of neurodegeneration in disorders like Huntington’s Disease and worked to understand how tissues become organized into coherent structures during development. The work brought him great satisfaction.

“I had the ability to come into the job each morning and basically play chess with nature,” he said. “And I got to do it with a lab full of wonderful people who interacted well, with students, postdocs and collaborations with colleagues.”

He takes pride in BioSci’s ever-increasing prestige. “I have been watching it for the past 40 years and you see it reflected in all kinds of things, from rankings to grants brought in and events that are sponsored. The school has been growing, and growing well.”