

Lady Marion – the Princess of the Bridge World

One of the first times I met Marion ten years ago she was a young teenager with a big flower in her hair, almost too shy to say hello to me. Today she has an air of self-confidence that derives from being one of the brightest female stars of the bridge world.

Today she is a bridge professional and just swam her way to the top the round robin in the Venice Cup in Bali as a member of the Dutch Women's team.

As a child Marion loved to play all games and was from birth blessed with a competitive nature out of the ordinary.

"I always want to win and perform well. If there is something I am not very good at I usually stop doing it." She laughs a little before making a confession: "I even cheat in board games because I am such a bad loser."

"My father plays bridge reasonably well. I wasn't really interested at first, but then my younger brother learned to play, and I couldn't stand that he could do something I couldn't so I wanted to learn."

Marion read all the bridge books and old magazines she could find and started to play with her younger brother at a club. They were a slight annoyance to their opponents, partly because they so quickly developed their bridge skills, partly because they always ate ice cream the table, making their opponents complain that the cards got sticky.

How was your relation to your brother?

"At the bridge table we were very eager to point out if one of us made mistakes. We both have a natural competitiveness. We grew over that and became older and wiser and have a good relationship now."

Marion was first noticed when she played with her brother in the Dutch U15 championships. The Dutch spot talents from an early age, and there was a selection for the U20.

"We got selected because I yelled at my brother for making a take-out double and he yelled at me for making a finesse. It wasn't a good idea to yell at each other, but at least we had some spark."



Caught at Junior Camp

During her teenage years bridge was the tree she clinched to in bad weather. Marion was a good – although a very light-working – student; however the teenage years presented challenges of a social character that endangered her self-esteem, had she not had her bridge life to escape to.

She went to her first junior camp in 2003 at 17.

“It was weird. A lot of people were older and smoking and drinking. It was fun to meet so many juniors and one of the reasons I got so caught playing bridge. It is so much fun when you have friends somewhere in the world.”

Not only did she quickly become confident as a bridge player; as a young girl at a bridge camp she also received a much appreciated attention from young men.

“Bridge has done a lot for me. It gave me a lot of confidence. A way of living, freedom. Boyfriend. Good friends and memories. It also helps other things, my way of thinking, dealing with people.”

World Champion Boyfriend

For a year now Marion is living in Sweden with her World Champion boyfriend in more than one respect, Johan Upmark from the Swedish open team.

What is wrong with Dutch men?

She looks at me with surprise and starts to laugh, slightly embarrassed.

“Nothing, except I like my swede better. Not that there is anything wrong with Dutch bridge players, but there was no match there, so I had to find it somewhere else. If you only play bridge you do not meet a lot of different men.”

What was it like to leave your country to move to Sweden to live with him?

“He didn’t want to move to the Netherlands. I have a few friends in Stockholm and been there many times. It would be difficult if I didn’t know anyone. I love Johan, but don’t like to follow him around every night – and he doesn’t like that either. I never saw it as a problem to move. I think you should decide together where you will be happiest.”

When did you decide to become a bridge professional?

“I never clearly decided from one moment to another. But during my law study I was supported by the Dutch Olympic Committee. After my study I didn’t look for jobs. I was a bridge pro since I didn’t do anything else.”

How did it start?

“In the beginning Meike and I paid our own travel expenses and tournament expenses. If you do well you get more invitations. We never went after it ourselves. Since 2006 we have had the support of the Dutch Olympic Committee and it has always been enough to support me.”

As a bridge player, what did your father think of your choice of career?

“He is proud of me now, but before he was not so happy about it. It was not so good for my study. He would have liked me pursue some other career. With my school I never worked a lot. With bridge I put a lot of effort in it and it paid off. If you want to do well with something you have to work hard, but you also get a reward for it.”

What do you dream about?

“Being very happy for the rest of my life. And then I want to win the World Championships.”

Short about Marion Michielsen

28 years old. Lives in Stockholm, Sweden with her Swedish world champion boyfriend Johan Upmark. Partners Meike Wortel who she played with as a junior, then had a few years break playing with Laura Dekkers and the pair is now back together.

Has a law degree from University but went straight on to work as a bridge professional.

Best bridge memory

Winning the European junior teams in Jesolo. Fun and nice team. A lot of fun every night. Junior tournaments are a lot of fun. They are more social, people go out more.

Hobbies

I played the piano, flute, in a youth orchestra, softball, chess. I more or less stopped with everything as I started to play bridge.

Top results

European juniors 2007

Open European women 2007

World youth pairs 2009

Open European mixed teams 2013
