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# FRANCES ROBERTS

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Frances Roberts has led the choirs and vocal jazz ensembles at Argyle Secondary School in North Vancouver for over 30 years. She is a sought-after adjudicator and clinician, often appearing at the BCMEA conference, and is highly involved in the choral community. Frances is the recipient of this year's BCMEA Outstanding Music Educator Award in the Secondary School category.

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## For anyone who doesn't know you, can you briefly describe your teaching career so far?

I have been teaching music at the secondary level for 32 years, primarily choir but also some band and strings. I started teaching at Collingwood School, West Vancouver in 1988 and have been at Argyle Secondary, North Vancouver for 30 years. During my career I have taught full time except for two years of maternity leaves (2 for 6 months and 1 for a year - three fabulous sons). I have had four different teaching partners in band over my career (this relationship is crucial). I also took an educational leave to complete my Master's Degree in Choral Conducting at UBC in 2014. I have been very fortunate to have a supportive community of parents and administrators at Argyle (most of the time). I currently have 3 choir classes (Choir 8, Choir 9/10, Choir 11/12), 1 Chamber Choir (auditioned 9-12) and 2 jazz choirs (auditioned - one junior one senior) and a strings ensemble 8-12.

The Argyle music program has been very productive and successful, maintaining 2 full time teachers, and some years a third teacher part time. annually these are the events:

- Fall Choir retreats
- Remembrance Day Ceremonies
- Winter & Christmas Concerts
- Christmas caroling engagements
- Junior Music Tour - January
- Senior Music Tour - spring
- Cap U Intensives Jan - Feb
- Spring Concerts
- Family of School events in Lynn Valley
- Festivals - regional/ local
- Canadian Rocky Mountain Festival
- Jazz Coffee House and CABARET Night
- Year End Concerts
- Graduation Ceremony

This is what I refer to as the Two-Week Treadmill of the school year - busy! And something I have been seriously re-evaluating during this COVID experience... another story...

## At what point in your career did you decide to start a family

My husband Geordie Roberts, who is also a professional musician and teaches at Capilano University and sings with Vancouver Chamber Choir, and I always knew we would have a family, but as my career got going and I was building the program at Argyle I could not fathom being a parent as well... I put it off till I was ready??? You can never be totally ready I soon realized. I had hit 30 years of age and Geordie was ready so we let it happen. I had almost 7 years teaching under my belt and five years building the program at Argyle so that my first graduating class I had to abandon for my maternity leave in the spring of 1995. It was the most amazing and terrifying event of my life. I still have the audiotape of songs and lullabies my Senior Vocal Ensemble class made for me to take to the hospital to keep me calm. This was the start of our family. My next maternity leave, in 1998, would be for 6 months and finally in 2001 I had a 12 month maternity leave – yeah!

## How has being a parent impacted your teaching?

It has had a huge impact on me and as my boys grow more lessons are learned. Firstly, I realized that you cannot make your child do anything if they do not want to. I am an organizer, creator and controller in my classroom and now at home I was learning that this was not gonna fly. I am now more understanding and aware of what my students are going through and I feel I am more empathic and flexible as a teacher.

I was pretty hard-nosed and demanding as a younger teacher and had very high expectations. I now do things somewhat differently and am more aware and sensitive to where my students are coming from. I still have high expectations but I am trying to be more in tune with the youth I teach and what they are experiencing. Life is complicated for adolescents! I am always aware of how I speak to them and use affirmations frequently as well as being as inclusive as possible. I want all my students to feel valued and part of our choral family. Making connections and community is more important.

I am more understanding with parents, and those that are single parents I take my hat off to you – I could not have managed my career and kids without my husband. He is the best dad and partner! I appreciate hearing from parents and have a better understanding of what they are going through.

## What words of wisdom would you give to music educators who are about to become parents?

Congratulations! Know that your life will be forever changed...for the better!

Being a parent has been the most challenging and rewarding job I have had in my life. Now the challenge of balancing being a music educator and a mother is the constant in my life. Being able to share and pass off the duties between you and your spouse are crucial. Open communication and a central calendar are vital!

Being present for those special moments in your child's life are special – be present!

It really is finding what works for your family, having all the support mechanisms in place so that you know your child is in good hands when you are not there. We were lucky, two of our boys were able to be in the childcare centre at Capilano University as Geordie was on faculty. We had no family in the Lower Mainland to be able to share the child rearing with. It takes a whole village! I also had some outstanding babysitters from my choirs over the years and am forever grateful.

Parenting teaches you so much and makes you re-examine how you operate with your students as well.

