

Golden Nuggets

LORRAINE FRIEDRICK... STEPPING OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

"I'M NOT JOINING EVERYTHING OR VOLUNTEERING FOR ANYTHING, FOR NOW AT LEAST. I JUST DON'T WANT A SCHEDULE, AFTER 40 YEARS OF HAVING EVERY MINUTE OF THE DAY PLANNED OUT. I DON'T WANT TO BE NEEDED AT A SPECIFIC PLACE AT A DEFINITE TIME. LAST YEAR WAS MY FIRST YEAR OF RETIREMENT AND I DID EVERYTHING. I WAS RUNNING OFF MY FEET. I THINK I WAS SCARED OF HAVING ALL THIS EXTRA TIME TO FILL."

Lorraine enjoyed a long and successful career in the classroom, the last several years teaching Grade 1 in Sylvan Lake. She was admired by her peers and loved by her students, and it took some courage to walk away from all that when she decided it was time to retire at the age of 63.

"I enjoyed the children right up to the end, though. I miss reading to them so much – I was really fortunate because my school was very strong and in the forefront of literacy. I consider myself blessed to have worked with a colleague who became my principal, a very wise and supportive leader who was knowledgeable and passionate about literacy. I just treasure the magic of kids and the support of my fellow staff – it was a wonderful career," said Lorraine.

"I had a loving and disciplined approach with my students. I worked hard to establish that expectation at the beginning of each school year and people commented on it a lot. You can't teach without a good relationship, so it was important to have strong communication and involve the whole family. I set out the rules and we all followed them, and my students were happy to be together in my class."

Lorraine's nurturing approach to each student, coupled with her expectation that they all aim high, garnered her a reputation for being a master teacher. She was invited to participate in many initiatives in her division, including representing her school on a unique Teachers Matter committee that came to be a model for strong collaboration in the province. In 2013, she was invited to join members of the school division's board and leadership team as the teacher representative at a Teachers Matter conference in San Diego. She was chosen to represent the division because she modeled excellence in the qualities of a strong teacher.

Lorraine spent a few years of her career teaching children of Canadian soldiers in Germany. She learned to speak German and ended up playing her clarinet in an 'oom-pah-pah' band. They played at Oktoberfest and all kinds of celebrations. Her interests outside of the classroom, including music, art, and, most importantly, raising her daughter on her own, helped her keep a great work/life balance which also set her up well for entering retirement. She had lots and lots of hobbies, and friends to enjoy them with! But she also felt a level of uncertainty stepping away from all the responsibilities that years of being a single mother and a dedicated teacher had required of her.

"I went to counselling a few times when I was getting ready to retire," said Lorraine. "I really didn't know what I was anymore, if I wasn't a teacher. I realized my identity was what I did for a living – what would happen when that was over? We talked about what I liked to do and what I always wanted to try but never had time for. I was 'all in' with my job, and the counsellor was very aware of that. She asked what things I could do to continue the activities I really liked about teaching – like reading to kids or having them read to me, or doing crafts or visiting the library.

"But I found so many personal interests which I was never able to explore before that I haven't gone back to the school yet. I've focused on strengthening my connections. I don't make my friendships an accidental thing – I plan on it and work on it. I'm so blessed - I have done all this, met so many people, been exposed to so many different ways of thinking. I wouldn't hesitate to go back to the counsellor if I ever felt the need, but it ended up that I sailed right into retirement."

She also remains involved in music, having spent six years on the Board of the Red Deer Symphony Orchestra, and piano is her main instrument. She played all through her career for the school choir and now loves playing what and when she wants to, and she's open to try wherever her interest leads her. She joined up with a local group of retired teachers who meet nearly every week for coffee, breakfast, movies, and other activities. And reading, reading, reading!

"I was always so busy with school things all those years, and now that I'm retired I'm discovering all the wonderful things there are to do! I love the public library's film festival evenings and I've reconnected with old friends that I just didn't have time to visit with before. I've joined an online music performance group in Calgary. I took several online art history classes, and a cooking class at 10 a.m. on a school day and felt marvelous! I spent 40 years in the classroom, and I would like to think I made a positive difference in children's lives. I loved my career – and now I'm loving retirement!"



Now Lorraine is able to spend more time visiting her parents and siblings in Lethbridge. She also really enjoys hanging out with her 28-year-old daughter, who is an interior designer in Calgary. They both enjoy travel, theatre, concerts, and museums, all the things Lorraine loved all along. "I made her my best friend!"



Lorraine belongs to two book clubs in Sylvan Lake and one online!

Do you know someone who has discovered a new hobby or project or way of adding joy and purpose to their days in retirement? Or discovered the time to pursue an old favourite? Let's celebrate them! Contact me at sandybexon@gmail.com

