

# Profile

## Bob Taverner



At BCRTA's 2018 AGM, Bob Taverner was awarded a Life Membership, the BCRTA's highest honour, in recognition of his significant contributions to the BCRTA over many years. Bob has long been acknowledged as the leading expert on BCRTA's policy and procedures, a title earned in no small part for his authorship of much of that material. Bob served as President of the BCRTA from September 2014 to September 2016.

Bob was born in 1942 in Adelaide, South Australia's capital city. He grew up in a family with two younger sisters. His father was a deeply religious man, a deacon and then an elder in his church. His mother was a very sociable, fun-loving person but, sadly, she passed away when Bob was in his mid-teens.

He went to an all-boys high school where he was active in the drama club. Somebody had to play female roles in their plays, of course, and Bob—who was possessed in those days of a voice that could span quite a range—played Titania, Queen of the Fairies, (*Midsummer Night's Dream*) in grade ten, *Lady Macbeth* in grade eleven, and finally transgendered to the male role of Edmund the Bastard (*King Lear*) in grade twelve. The most painful role was that of *Lady Macbeth*, he recalls,

because of the too-tight bra he had to wear, stuffed as it was with tennis balls. But that helped him to ignore the initial laughter of the rest of the school when he first appeared on stage in his long green dress! His (er, her) lines, "Come, you spirits / That tend on moral thoughts, unsex me here / And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full / Of direst cruelty" sobered the audience enough for "*Lady Macbeth*" to continue, and to be treated with the respect she so richly deserved for her inimitable acting skills.

Bob took the standard (in those days) two years of teacher training. Having to take courses at both the teachers' college and Adelaide University, several miles apart, he found it useful to purchase some wheels for himself, which he acquired in the form of a Lambretta motor scooter. He remembers that as the most fun vehicle he's ever had, in spite of its top speed of only 55 or so kmh. It earned him no speeding tickets, of course, a great boon for a penurious teachers' college student.

Bob's first teaching assignment was as a grade three teacher in a mid-sized country school. Forty-two pupils in his first class, and forty-five in the next. He supplemented his income by driving school bus, transporting children—and himself—to school in the morning, and home to the farms where they, and he, lived, in the afternoon. He remembers being permitted to siphon the last gallon or two of liquid from the drums of bus fuel stored at the farm, by tilting them sideways, for use in the VW he was now driving. Saved him a few dollars—all of which were very precious in those days!

He was transferred part way through his third year to a city demonstration school, where he supervised student teachers in their practicums. Supervising student teachers, he found, was very useful in helping him to improve his own teaching! Bob was able, at this stage, to afford to rent for himself a small "granny flat", sited in the back yard of an elderly widower. The only downside, Bob found, was that the only bathroom available to him was in the main house, not always available quite when he needed to access it.

Almost three years on, Bob joined what the Education Department called its "Permanent



Patricia Clough presents Bob Taverner with his award.

Relieving Staff”, a group of teachers sent out to fill in for principals on leave from small schools: anywhere from one-teacher to seven-teacher schools, for anywhere from a week to four months. It was while Bob was acting principal in a suburban Adelaide school that he met Di, a grade four teacher whom he came to greatly admire. (Very greatly, he says!) They dated, became engaged, married, and applied for and were accepted into teaching jobs in Prince Rupert, BC, on their way “to seeing more of the world”. A desire to “see the world” was (and is) common among young Australians, many of whom back-packed around Europe or elsewhere, or moved to Canada to fill the teacher-shortage that was in effect back in the late 60s and early 70s.

A year of frequent rainy days (and a Christmas with no snow) drove the couple to move from Prince Rupert to Sparwood, in the Fernie School District. There they enjoyed less rain and plenty of snow. (What’s the point of moving from sunny Australia to cool Canada, if not to experience a white Christmas?) Now they were also able to learn, first hand, what vehicle “plug-ins” were all about.

Sparwood was the new town built to replace the coal-dust grimed East Kootenay towns of Natal and Michel, located too close to the mine that provided most of the working people’s incomes. The city fathers claimed their new town to be “the clean coal capital of Canada”. Before Natal was entirely demolished, however, its hospital became the birthplace of Bob and Di’s first child, a bonny bouncing boy.

Bob and Di needed to upgrade from their two-year-trained status, of course, and so after four years in the Elk Valley they moved to the Lower Mainland for a year, to enable them to attend classes at UBC. Quite an education in itself, Bob found, attending university as a “mature student”, surrounded by all that youthful exuberance!

Both the Taverners took teacher-librarian courses, and so were happy to accept jobs next in Prince George, a district renowned back then for its school library programmes. Almost every school was blessed with a teacher-librarian, and many also had a library clerk.

Not long after their move to PG, the couple was blessed with a second child, this time a bonny bouncing daughter. Bob and Di found the Prince George to be a great place to raise a family, and they themselves made many lasting friendships. They stayed for 27 years.



Bob especially loved camping and fishing in the Central Interior’s many lakes. He and a buddy camped often at the idyllic Barton Lake, and came to refer to it as “the Barton Bar-and-Grill”, for the shrimp, bacon, elk steaks and occasional fish that they cooked over their campfires. Accompanied by refreshing beverages! Di and the kids also loved camping, preferring the comfort of a well-equipped tent trailer; and the family spent a few weeks every summer enjoying camping on Shuswap Lake in the Thompson-Okanagan. That’s where the kids learned important skills like chopping wood while keeping feet and hands intact. Much to their parents’ relief.

Upon retirement Bob and Di decided to leave Prince George’s icy winters (enough was enough!) to eastern Vancouver Island, first to the Parksville-Qualicum area, and more recently to Nanaimo. There they have joined one of the city’s Probus clubs, and signed up in several of its activity groups: wine tasting, Mexican Train dominoes, pub nights, etc. A great way, they’re finding, to make new friends.

Bob and Di are members of the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Branch of the BCRTA. He has chaired the Advocacy, Finance, Personnel and Communications Committees, and has served as 2nd VP, 1st VP, President and Past-President.

Bob and his wife love to travel, and in retirement they have visited Australia (of course), New Zealand, Bali, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, the Cook Islands, France, Italy, the Caribbean, Mexico, Costa Rica and much of the western USA. They annually visit their son, his wife and their granddaughter in New York, and their daughter, her husband and their two grandsons in Medicine Hat. The couple originally moved to Canada as a first step in “seeing the world”, and the travels they have enjoyed in retirement have gone a long way toward helping them to realize that goal.