

# Profile

## JoAnn Lauber



It is said that nostalgia is a memory of something that never happened. This rings true for me as it seems that only the lovely and romantic are left in memories of my childhood on the Canadian prairie - times which shaped my character and my future.

I am the third of six sisters. We lived midway between two highways in Alberta, 40 minutes on rough country roads from any town. We lived on land my dad purchased in its original state: heavily treed, fertile and gently rolling; at its western end, a picturesque coulee, untouched, a stream running through it. Poplars, willows and berry trees, shooting stars, tiger lilies and forest strawberries grew there; wild animals haunted its secret places. Our days as a family were occupied with farm chores and the simple outdoor pleasures of prairie life; and our evenings — pre-television, pre-electricity, pre-screen technology — were passed reading, singing in harmony, and learning to play musical instruments. We had a family musical ensemble and we played for barn dances, community gatherings and wedding celebrations. My bandmaster father claimed that I was “the hottest drummer from coast to coast.” I know that I was at least the loudest.

We all attended Lornedale, a one-room school that was located, one could only say, in the middle of nowhere, far from the school district centre of Holden, Alberta. As a group of fewer than 25 pupils in grades one to nine, we became independent students as our inspiring teachers instilled in us the love of learning. My grade group of six “buds” included Bobby Sutter, uncle to the famed hockey family who lived on the farm adjacent to us; the hockey boys’ dad was in my older sister’s grade. We neighbours supported each other; we kids squabbled with each other, played together, learned together, and had adolescent crushes.

As prairie kids a few “understandings” were impressed on us: Run Sheep Run at lunch break was not to take us across the vast prairie to hide in the copse of poplars in the next section of land; if we wanted to skate we first had to clear the pond of snow within the allotted lunch hour; and the horse was not to be led into the school – ever again,

as it had been when the Mrs. Chilibeck had gone home for the day!

Our prairie childhood, our bond with the land and our early education instilled in us confidence and strength. From grades one to nine our teachers prepped us for the grade nine provincial exams, and the results rewarded their diligence. For a penny a week we all belonged to the Red Cross Club, raising money for the less fortunate. We learned to formulate motions according to the Rules of Order, taking turns being president and secretary and treasurer. As a part of a regular routine we pledged allegiance to the flag and recited the Lord’s Prayer. We played Fox and Goose in the winter and challenged neighbouring schools to games of softball in the summer. We all cleaned our classroom (which was the entire school) on Friday afternoon. We heard every lesson nine times. Books transported us into worlds of delight far from the remote schoolhouse where we studied. Every week we wrote a formal essay and had a geography test. I was weird: I loved the exams. I loved English grammar, and I read like a maniac.



JoAnn the young English teacher.

After high school, I responded to the province's call for teachers, and took a one-year "Junior E" teacher training course at the U of A, far from home. The marks I presented to the university, the product of my dedicated high school teachers, were such that my parents did not have to sell a cow or a load of wheat to support me, though the offer was there. That year was one of the most stimulating and maturing years of my life: first, the big city, then classes from eight to four every week day and courses in educational philosophy and psychology on Saturday mornings; student teaching in the fall when I was seventeen and again in spring as part of the teacher training program.

At eighteen I had my first job in a Grade 5 classroom in my home town. I loved it.

Two years later, I returned to the University of Alberta, graduating with a bachelor's degree in education, with a major in humanities. My love for stories and poems and grammar took me to high schools in the County of Beaver in Alberta where I taught English for seven years.

A principal recently appointed to the school in my hometown of Viking traversed the district, persuading this teacher and that to join his new staff. Several of us, flattered by being asked, agreed, and there we were: each of us the head, and often the only member, of the high school's various departments. One teacher new to the staff was Dale Lauber. He was smart, funny and stunningly good looking. He and the social studies department head, Tom Newcomb, lived next door to me and my colleague Pat Coffin in the town's new teacher fourplex, dubbed the "sin bin" by our vice-principal. Dale and I were married in February. Our students found out about what was supposed



Students crashed JoAnn and Dale's wedding.

to be our quiet wedding, and they filled the church to capacity for what they considered the event of the year – two of their teachers marrying each other! Though I was yearbook advisor that year, Dale and I were surprised by a page that sneaked into the book – one that featured a picture of us exiting the church, our students pelting us with rice and confetti, and next to that photo, Shakespeare's Sonnet 116.

In September of 1970 we took a trip abroad, travelling from Liverpool to Vienna to Istanbul and Moscow and all places between – just out of curiosity. When we returned five months later, hugely enlightened, pretty well penniless, thanking our lucky stars to be living in Canada, we chose to move to British Columbia. It was March and we were looking for work. Dale landed a job in Ucluelet, teaching high school math. We moved there to keep body and soul together but we also walked in the old growth forest, saw our first orcas, and cooked crab in cauldrons on the beach. I read War and Peace, filling these three months, the only time in my life as a teacher when I did not have a full-time job. We gloried in beauty and freedom and majesty that Long Beach had to offer; it remains one of our favourite places on earth.

In 1971 Ucluelet and Tofino were still accessible only by twisty and hazardous logging roads and long waits at the ferry terminal, so in the fall we moved to Prince George. I went to the Connaught Jr. Secondary School Reading Centre and Dale to the Spruceland Library. For four years we enjoyed our schools and students, and we loved the northern way of life – learning to ski and snowshoe, pulling 360s on the icy Nechako River Bridge, buying our first home, and becoming life-long friends with our colleagues almost all of whom were also "from away".



But the richness of family, the love of our parents and our sisters and their families, made us realize that a single visit at Easter time or at Christmas was not enough for us. In 1975 we moved to the Fraser Valley, and for the next twenty-four years



In 2014 JoAnn was elected President of ACER-CART, the national body of retired teachers in Canada..

in the Langley District Dale worked at Mountain Secondary School and as a BCTF director while my teaching life was rich with senior English classes, work as a reading consultant and debating coach, and as a counselor of Grade 12 students. A master's degree and a graduate diploma in counselling psychology enabled me to fulfill leadership roles in the English and counselling departments, to be involved in the senior English provincial exam program, and to serve on accreditation teams evaluating high schools in the province.

In Langley we established strong ties with our teacher colleagues who have become our friends for life, and we bask in the closeness of the love and support of family, which we sought when we moved to the lower mainland.

When I retired after 37 years of teaching, having devoted myself largely to the demands and delights of the English classroom, I wondered how I would cope. Who was I now? What would I do? What could I do? Dale is a smart and funny guy, but he is also independent and doesn't really desire constant supervision and advice. When an opportunity arose to teach English 12 to international high school students at Dorset College in New Westminster, I grabbed it, and found the richness that students from around the world can provide. This new work, along with a suggestion from Maureen Pepin to edit the Langley retired teachers' newsletter and a suggestion by BCRTA President Owen Corcoran to serve on the association's board ensured that life was filled with activity, purpose, and meaning, with the welfare of my retired teacher peers in mind.

For the last sixteen years I have been a member of the Executive of the BCRTA working on various committees. My precious moments include working with some of the most noble people on earth – and producing a recruitment DVD for the BCRTA with retired teacher colleague/friends of the Langley District and with Brookwood Secondary School; mounting the “Keep the Heart in Medicare” health accord campaign; creating the Declaration Concerning a National Health Care Strategy for Seniors; and in 2011, working with Cliff Boldt, Judy de Vries, Dale Lauber, Sheila Pither, Howard Spence and the BCTF Research Department to produce the BCRTA Report on Volunteerism Among Retired Educators.

The Canadian Association of Retired Teachers (ACER-CART) have seen me hanging around their AGMs for thirteen years -- seven as Director representing the BCRTA, one as Region West Representative, one year as Vice-President, and two years each as President and Past President.

Today, as I am privileged to continue to work with committees of the BCRTA and ACER-CART to ensure the security of pension plans, to promote the interests and guard the welfare of our peers, I am struck always by the altruism and humanity, the generosity and integrity of retired teachers. As MP Peter Julian said to our AGM assembly in September, “The BCRTA is a force for good.” And so, too, are our retired teacher colleagues across the land – more than 160,000 of them in thirteen vibrant associations – all are members of society's force for good — community leaders and educators, volunteers, helpers, caregivers.

The poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson said, “I am a part of all that I have met”. I like to add, “All that I have met are a part of me” — in fact, any part of me that might happen to be good or honourable or worthy — I owe to the richness of working in the Canadian school system and with retired teachers of this land – working for you and working with you. I am grateful for having had that opportunity.

*JoAnn Lauber* is a Past President of ACER-CART, and Contributing Editor to PostScript Magazine. In 2018 she received BCRTA's Lifetime Membership Award.

