

"From Stephenville Crossing to Memorial: My educational journey"

Annette Marie Mallay

On September 25th, 1967 a small baby girl was born into a loving Catholic family of nine in a small town of Stephenville Crossing in the picturesque Bay St. George area of the West Coast. Like the characters in Roch Carrier's "The Hockey Sweater", this little girl would grow up in a town where school, Church and hockey on the pond were the three most important aspects of life.

This little girl was me, Annette Marie Mallay nee Alexander, youngest child of Paschal and Lydia Alexander. My life was rich and full with family, love and friendship. My early schooling was at a Catholic Elementary School, St. Michael's Elementary. My fondest memory of early education was in Grade 3, we moved into a brand new school with a double gym and French lab. Maybe this memory is foreshadowing for the career that I would choose. The French lab still is a memory that stays with me. Gleaming tape recorders and headphones that allowed us to hear the formal and sophisticated voices of French speakers from France!

My high school years were influenced by Catholic Mercy nuns, who were so amazing and dedicated to our school that I still remember with pride the invaluable lessons and encouragement they gave me. They were the first mentors to spark my desire to become an educator and they encouraged me to attend Memorial. Simple little words and hopes that were so influential on the course my life took, still amaze me. Two Sisters in particular added excitement to my education and acted as catalyst for the path I would take were Sr. Maureen O'Keefe, my French teacher and Sister Marie Crotty, my principal. These two women would go beyond their vocation to instill in me the desire to learn and light a fire to motivate me to take the risk and go to university.

My parents were supportive and never spoke of "if" but "when" I would go to Memorial. My mother was educated at the Grace General Hospital of Nursing and my dad, an electrician, wanted more for me and so they did their best to point me to the Grenfell Campus to start first year studies.

From an early age, I was called to teach. I would line up my teddy bears and teach them their alphabet and numbers. I was eager to learn French words from Sesame Street and use them when I needed too. The desire to teach became stronger the closer I got to Grade 12 and I attribute it to the love and support I got from many of my amazing teachers at that small school in Stephenville Crossing. These people are still confidants today.

I started my studies at Grenfell College and had an unforgettable experience there. The calibre of professors and the quality of education was second to none. After two years, I came to St. John's and started at Memorial. I fell in love with the city and enjoyed the diversity that existed at Memorial St. John's campus. I completed by conjoint degree in English/French and Secondary education and began teaching with The RC School Board. After changes were made to the denominational school system in Newfoundland and Labrador, I had my first child. I craved the classroom and teaching, and returned to it after a year. It was shortly after my daughter turned three that my life direction changed again and I applied to a school that had not

even started. I was going back to my roots and using the skills afforded to me by the sisters, I was going to teach at an independent Catholic school! Many variables were certain. Would this school stay open? Could it survive in the climate of the times? I took the risk.

Today, after 14 years, I am so glad to say that I took the risk. St. Bonaventure's College is alive and well and the risk I took allowed me to carry out my vocation to be a French teacher at an amazing school with wonderful young men and women to teach. I have never looked back and am thankful for the many blessings in my life.

In 2013, I graduate from Memorial University with a Masters in Educational Leadership Studies. I am so proud of being able to do this program at Memorial and I am grateful that I was able to choose this university again to continue my life long learning.