

# Reflections Of My Life As A Band Director's Spouse

## Funny Parsons, Spouse of 2016 Bandmaster of the Year

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In the mid-1950s, beginners' band was my introduction to the band world. At the age of eleven, I began playing the tenor saxophone and continued playing throughout high school. I loved everything about band, especially our band director, Mr. Wilson Barnett. Mr. Barnett was a great teacher. He was tough, but fair, hardworking, and asked only for us to do our best.

Bob was also in the band in Gilmer, but he was four years older and therefore we weren't in the band at the same time. He graduated high school in 1960, the year that I came into the high school band. Bob was a very good trumpet player, beginning private lessons with Mr. Tatum of Tatum Music Co. at the age of ten. From there, Bob continued playing trumpet throughout high school and earning membership in the All State Band in 1957.

After high school, we both attended college. Bob graduated from the University of Texas, and I graduated from East Texas State University, now Texas A&M University at Commerce. I did my student teaching at Gladewater High School and was hired as an English teacher for the upcoming school year. I was finishing my last summer session at ETSU before graduating when Bob and I reconnected after growing up together in Gilmer. He had been in Germany studying linguistics when Bob's father called him about a band director position at New Diana High School. Bob was excited about the opportunity, but he was not certified to teach. Mr.

Harlan Thacker, superintendent of the New Diana ISD, hired Bob with an emergency certificate. While we both took courses that summer at ETSU, we started dating and within a year we were married.

After we married August 1, 1969, Bob and I lived in Longview, Texas, commuting to our teaching jobs in



New Diana and Gladewater. Bob was very fortunate to have many talented and willing band directors to help him with the band at New Diana. The New Diana Band won their first Sweepstakes Award in 1970.

At the end of the 1969-1970 school year, Bob was asked to start a band program at Bishop Dunne High School, a private Catholic high school in Dallas. Bob took the job and off we went to Oak Cliff in Dallas. Fortunately, I was able to teach eight grade language arts at Reed Jr. High in Duncanville, with a wonderful faculty and administration, and soon moved to Byrd Middle School when it opened.

The years at Bishop Dunne were very rewarding. The administration, the faculty, the community and most of all, the students were exceptional. Among other honors while we were there, the Bishop Dunne Band won first place in the National Catholic Band Masters Contest in 1977. While at Bishop Dunne, we met many directors and their families in the Dallas area. We made lasting friendships with Bishop Dunne band parents, faculty, and students. In 2011, the Bishop Dunne School Board and former students honored Bob by naming the band hall the Bob Parsons Band Hall.

During the 1970-1978 years at Bishop Dunne, our two daughters were born. Emily was born in 1973, and Susan was born in 1974. Although our girls were too young to remember a lot about those years, they participated in the band activities from the beginning. The girls and I attended all football halftime performances and went on all band trips. What fun and exciting years those were!

In the summer of 1978, Bob and I moved to Richardson, Texas, where Bob was assistant director with Scott Taylor, the director of the Richardson High School Band. I was fortunate to take a position at Westwood Junior High, a Richardson feeder, teaching Texas History and Language Arts. We weren't there a full year when Bob was contacted by the superintendent of Jacksonville ISD about taking the job as high school band director. Our good friend, Val

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Rose, had been the director there, so we knew how good the program was and what an opportunity this would be.

We finished our school year at Richardson, bought a house in Jacksonville, and by the end of the summer, we were ready to begin life in Jacksonville and East Texas again. Our daughters entered pre-k and first grade that fall, and I taught eighth grade American History at Jacksonville Middle School. While Bob was at the band hall from sunrise to sunset, our girls were busy with dance lessons, gymnastics, Brownies, CCD classes, and I taught my wonderful eighth graders and coached UIL events. Every summer Bob and I took a group of eighth graders to Washington, D.C. I'll always remember the great times we had on those trips! In August of 1981, our son, John was born. Emily and Susan were beyond happy with our new addition to the family. Before we knew it, John was in school at East Side Elementary, and the girls were in the Jacksonville Middle

School Band and later in the Jacksonville High School band. Emily played bassoon and Susan played French horn. The Jacksonville High School Band continued its excellence under Bob's teaching and his concert band was named the TMEA Class AAAA Honor Band in 1986.

From the fall of 1979-1990, we enjoyed eleven fantastic years in Jacksonville. The students that we taught were amazing. Their parents were so supportive and helped to make their children's band experience successful. We still stay in contact with many of the students and friends from our years in Jacksonville, especially our band director friends and their families.

Our last move in our odyssey came in July of 1990. Kerry Taylor, the director of the Westlake High School Band called about a band director position at West Ridge Middle School. Bob accepted the West Ridge job, and I taught eighth grade American History at Hill Country Middle School.

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Bob was always really proud of the success of his students in continuing their enjoyment of music at Westlake. I continued sponsoring the Washington, D.C. trip as I had in Jacksonville. Our daughters finished high school in Austin and both graduated from the University of Texas in Austin. Our son, John, began band in the Hill Country Middle School Band and continued band as a percussionist in the Westlake High School Band, where he earned membership in the All State Band. John also enjoyed his ensemble experiences while majoring in music at the University of Texas. In Austin we expanded our band director friendships in the Central Texas area, as well as making new friends with our faculties and their families.

In 1992, Bob and I became board members of TBA. We served on the board from 1992-1999. During those eight years, we made lasting friends with the other members of the board and their families. Our friends on the TBA board

increased each year as new members came on the board. Being on the board of TBA gave us a unique opportunity to appreciate all the benefits that TBA provides its members. It also provided a way for us to give back to TBA by serving on the board. We will always treasure those years. Each year we look forward to July when we attend the TBA convention and its many educational clinics and the fun, family events that are planned by the board. We are happy that Steven Moore, who was first chair trumpet in Bob's Jacksonville High School Band, is President of TBA this year and his talented wife, Monica, is President of the TBA Spouses Board.

We retired in 2002 after teaching over thirty years. Bob and I both enjoyed those years immensely and feel very fortunate to have had the opportunities to teach so many outstanding young people. It is especially gratifying to have watched them become the successful people they are today.