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Valks, Sandra

Singing has been like an escape for Valks, through high and low points in her life.

She grew up in the tiny community of Mapleview, just north of Stockdale and her parents operated a turkey farm.

She attended the same one-room school where her dad went and then proceeded to Brighton High School, now known as East Northumberland Secondary School.

Valks enrolled at Peterborough Teachers' College and graduated with a teaching certificate in 1967. It's the same year she got married.

She taught for two years at Brighton Public School and another two years at Breadner Primary School at CFB Trenton. Then the military wife and mother of two children moved to Germany and lived there almost four years.

The family returned to Ottawa in 1976 and Valks took a job as a singing waitress in a German dining establishment. She sang (in English) as part of the evening entertainment in a stint that lasted almost three years.

The family returned to the Frankford area in 1978 and Valks went to work as banquet supervisor at the former Wandlyn Inn then, for three years, a waitress at the Gasthaus Kutsch, a German restaurant in Trenton.

In 1981 Valks left waitressing to go back to school. She was in the first group of adults enrolled in regular daytime adult retraining classes at Belleville Collegiate Institute. She concentrated on business courses "to try and break into the business world."

Her schooling paid off when she joined London Life as a life insurance agent. She remained with the firm for 13 years, including six years as a member of the Million Dollar Round Table.

Her work took a toll on her. She became a workaholic which led to burnout and a marriage breakdown.

She left London Life in 1995 and a year later opened her own financial planning business, Valks Financial, in her St. Paul Street home.

She is a certified financial planner and chartered life underwriter helping clients achieve financial independence.

"I'm happy with the business because I get to choose my life now. It allows me the freedom to pursue personal growth, sharing in community life and singing," said Valks.

Valks figures she has been a choir member or soloist at some church since she was five years old.

"Singing is in my blood. It's always been there for me, through good and bad."

She began singing at weddings at the age of 12, funeral as an adult, including those of her father and brother.

"In recent years, people are making their personal requests for songs they want me to sing at their funerals and, sadly enough, four or five of those personal requests have been completed."

She enjoys singing at both weddings and funerals.

"Weddings are joyful celebrations but funerals are very meaningful...singing at a funeral helps bring closure in saying 'goodbye' to their loved ones," said Valks.

For a change of pace "and for the real fun," Valks and her life partner Bill Winter operate a disc jockey and entertainment service called Crum'Bum 'N Seagull (their pet names for one another).

"We work as a team. Bill does all the DJ work and equipment and I do all the microphone work and sing."

The community has also heard Valks sing at such events as the Festival of Trees, Bayshore Picnic, Brown Bag lunches at the library, VON's adult day care programs in Belleville and Trenton and antique car shows.

"Singing is my natural way of touching my inner soul...it's a great release and therapy. It's just who I am."