

Manderville, Kathleen

By Sarah MacWhirter *Sept. 19/99 p. 9*
The Intelligencer

As a youngster, Kathleen Manderville didn't want her friends to know she could sing.

She hid her talent and told no one about her voice lessons and competitive singing, fearful they'd deem her a geek and banish her forever from their circle of coolness.

She didn't realize her love of song would one day lift her from the depths, reinstate her strength and help her find her powerful inner voice again.

At the age of five, Manderville started singing lessons, and embarked on a years-long journey of music festivals and singing competitions. But it wasn't until she was selected to join the Ontario Youth Choir and ventured to London, Ont., with a group of like-minded teenage musicians that she discovered the joy a collective musical experience delivers.

Today, she sings and performs with the musical group Harmonie, in Pinnacle Playhouse productions, and in other musical ensembles. Her music is at once a source of rapturous joy and raw energy, a high that fuels her bubbly enthusiasm for hours and days to come.

Mother of Thomas, 10, and Breanne, 6, Manderville teaches at Quinte Mohawk School in Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory.

"I love my teaching. There's no question about it — I absolutely love it and I get a lot out of it too. ... There's a lot of return there. I teach with a community that's not easy to break into. To get the respect and appreciation from the community and the students is really special."

That appreciation is shown in small ways, and in one very big way, too. Manderville was nominated for and received the school's first Teacher-of-the-Year award. At the school's graduation ceremony last year, a student read the nomination letter — leaving Manderville in tears and the audience on their feet applauding their appreciation.

Despite its proximity to Belleville, Manderville said Tyendinaga Territory is true to its culture. And she knows a bit more about that culture than most non-natives. Not only does she teach there, she was once married to a Tyendinaga man.

"I married a native man and that's where I started in native education," she said. He was her high school sweetheart, but it was a relationship that soured. A very nasty and very public divorce followed.

"I was on my own with a six-week old baby and a four-and-a-half-year-old boy, and everyone in that community knew about it and all the circumstances."

Still, Manderville stayed at the school, even after moving back to Belleville.

Teaching at a native school "took on a much bigger role in my life than it initially seemed to be," she said.

Teaching has always been a mainstay for Manderville, but it was music that brought her back from the emotional despair of divorce.

"For a year I was the walking wounded, no doubt about it."

Getting involved in the community, in the Pinnacle Playhouse, in Harmonie, in her church and in a single mothers' support group helped her find her strength again.

"In the worse part of my marriage I was completely cut off from my music," she said.

Now, "I'm so involved, so excited about what I do, it takes me two hours just to come back down. Music to me is exhilarating, spiritual. Nothing can make me cry quicker than music."

With her children, music and teaching, Manderville feels fulfilled. Somehow, it's important to her that others know that. She is tired of



Kathleen Manderville

The joy and power of song

the assumptions people make about her and her children because they share a single-parent household.

"Single mothers need to know they're not losers. For most of us there really is light at the end of the tunnel. The negative stereotypes about single motherhood are really totally wrong," she said.

"Despite the difficulties, we have a lovely family life."