

Mohammed, Jeannette

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# Games and songs help teach French

*p. 19*

By Jack Evans  
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French is fun. That's what Jeannette Mohammed, long-time French teacher at Harmony Public School recalls from her own high school years. She also recalls that the people who taught French also seemed to have a lot of fun. So when she became a teacher herself more than 30 years ago with the then Hastings County Board of Education, teaching French became one of her goals.

She realized that goal shortly after by completing a special teacher level French immersion course and then taking to the roads the following fall to teach elementary French at five schools over a 80 kilometre distance.

One can understand that many students for one reason or another, don't like certain subjects, especially arithmetic or grammar. But French is different.

"In this area, in my early years, I actually found a hatred of French, both the language and the people," she said. "It was difficult to overcome at times."

She's been at Harmony School in Thurlow Ward for almost 30 years. And children now call her "Madame Mo," thoroughly enjoying her classes which she spices with games and songs. Many of them she writes herself, accompanying the songs on a guitar which she learned to play when she was young.

"I've always written songs as a pastime," she said, something she continues to enjoy.

Mohammed credits her parents with a strong grounding in "compassion" and her father, especially, for a "sense of humour."

She's also known around Harmony School as "the frog lady," going back to an interest in frogs she developed as a creek-prowling child. That interest goes beyond live frogs to frog collectibles like earrings.

She's also been involved in past years with the Aids Awareness Committee and with the Club Alouette group (for French Canadians.)

She's also been active in Holy Rosary Church where she serves as a church reader. And thereby hangs another tale.

"I lost my faith in God when I was in high school, and I also was at the point of giving up on French," she recalled. That was because of a lacklustre teacher in her first year.

But her next teacher encouraged her to take part in a French exchange program with a family in Quebec. That led to new friendships, immediate exposure to a new culture and, through her new French Canadian friends, a revival of her Christian faith.

It is the concept of a different culture and "learning beyond the end of one's nose" that Mohammed tries to instil in her pupils.

Now facing retirement next year, "I will really miss teaching French," she reflected. "I especially love the feedback I get from the kids."



Jeannette Mohammed

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