

BALANCING ACT: In My Shoes

By Jennifer Dillard, TBA Secretary



Coming off of National Women's month, I'd like to celebrate some very special people in our profession; women band directors and most importantly women band directors that are mothers. It goes without saying, our profession is fast paced and all encompassing. Being a band director in this profession now for twenty-two years and also having two children, a fifteen year old and six year old, I feel compelled to celebrate the women who wear two hats and work to maintain balance in their lives each and every day.

Since the pandemic there has been much talk about balance between work and home life, both positive and negative. I'm not here to judge either way but speak and celebrate all of us that work hard to be the best we can be for all facets of our lives.

As a young band director, I spent every waking moment at the band hall working to polish my craft. I reflect on this often and realize I still am putting in the same drive and desire to do my very best, just more efficiently than those beginning days. Jerriald, my husband of 23 years who is also a band director, and I both were, as one would describe work-a-holics. To be honest, not a lot of that has changed.

As young band directors we decided to put having a family on hold so we could grow our craft. That was the

"right" path for our family. I often reflect on whether this was the right choice for us and I always come back to, yes. I felt the pressure from family and friends to "hurry up" and start a family, however, I stuck to what I started. I was so passionate about my craft that I felt I could not balance the two at that young stage of my career. Not everyone's story is the same, however, this was the fit for us.

Becoming a mother was the most joyous time of my life and continues to be. It is one of the biggest and most challenging jobs I will ever have, and I would not change it for the world. Women are built to nurture, and I've become a better teacher and mentor because of my children. I used to scoff when colleagues or parents would use the phrase "you'll understand when you become a parent," but I truly do understand the root of their gesture now that I have my own children.

Balance is an ever changing and developing story. There are times the pendulum swings more to one side than the other and then back the other way. Balance is a constant work in progress. One thing I have learned is there will always be peaks and valleys in all areas of life, not just professional, but personal as well. As directors we are so good at giving grace to students who struggle, but often don't give ourselves the same grace in our professional and personal lives.

Unfortunately, there is no instruction manual for life. Each and every day we get up and try to do our best for ourselves and do what's best for others. It certainly takes a village, and I am glad all of you are in my village.

I struggled when my own children were born to balance this fast-paced career with these new beautiful blessings I was supposed to nurture and guide through life. Oh, and they didn't come with an instruction manual, which terrified me. I will say the struggle never goes away, it is just ever evolving and changing within our family and professional lives. Our peaks for our family have been very high and our valleys have been so incredibly low. One of the most challenging times was the miscarriage of our 2nd child right before Thanksgiving in 2010. Everyone knows the struggle of the fall and the craziness of the holiday season. In my mind, how was I supposed to lose my child, and continue on. The truth is, it takes time, and you lean on others for support. I have many friends that have experienced similar love and loss and my heart goes out to you. Life is messy, not perfect.

I love my children and family so deeply, but I can also say I feel the same about the children I have had

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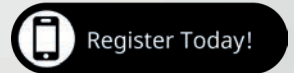
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the pleasure of teaching each and every day. To be good at anything you must devote intentional time, this not only includes band directing, but parenting and your relationships as well. This is a balance that not only myself, but my husband continues to work through each and every day as we go through this thing called life. Are we a perfect “Pinterest/Facebook family”, absolutely not. I may have piles of laundry that need to be folded, or a dishwasher that needs to be unloaded or shoes scattered about the entryway, but at the end of the day I know we are making a difference to our children at home and at school

each and every day. They come away knowing they are loved, cared for, supported, and appreciated.

Mom or parent guilt is a real and ever-changing reality of my life. I know many of you feel the same. There are days I feel like I’ve been the best parent I can be and then there are days I have felt like I have failed at everything. This can be said about my professional side of things as well. We have all shared our stories about our brightest and darkest days in our band halls. One thing I’ve learned is it’s all about perspective and how you view your world.

The truth is, ALL my kids need me, not just my blood and flesh. I am not just their teacher, but their mom away from home, therapist, nurse, caretaker, voice of reason, confidant, soundboard, and cheerleader. Each of them fills my tank with love, respect, and gratitude. I think about the many blessings we are able to experience together when we make beautiful music and memories together. There is always a silver lining to all the rough patches in life. You may not see it now, but you will years from now. Keep up the good fight and know we are sowing the seeds of the future.



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