

## □ HOW ON EARTH DID SUCH A THING HAPPEN TO ME □

I have to explain. I know that a good number of *Liaison* readers have seen this 'damning' picture in a previous issue of this journal.

In fact, not only have a good number of my colleagues expressed their surprise at seeing me with a violin in my hands, but some have gone as far as to ask me, tongue in cheek, whether I was the teacher or just another of the students. I thought it should be clear that it was the latter. I should say that many have also claimed that it was absolutely unacceptable that I should add insult to injury; i.e., augment the noise I make at the office with deafening sounds at home for my family.

The pressure has become too intense for me to bear and the time has come for me to explain all this. I have decided to tell your readers everything they never wanted to know and would therefore not ask.

First of all, I want to make this very clear. I am not an offender. I am a victim. It all started many years back. About a year or two before our posting to Brussels, we had decided to get our children to improve on their musical talents – or lack thereof. Of course we chose Jacqueline Bilodeau-Lessard's school in Hull. Jacqueline's husband was a good friend of ours – and still is – and we knew of her remarkable piano talents. Rapidly we found out that in addition she was the most energetic music professor I had ever met – truly a driving force. Very soon I found myself driving my kids (three of them) back and forth from the Civic Hospital area to Hull every Saturday, spending long hours waiting for them in the tiny, smoke-filled room adjacent to the studio.

That is when I committed the only real crime that can be held against me and which I still deeply regret: I asked

Jacqueline if there was anything I could do while waiting (it was impossible to read, write or think in such an atmosphere). Mrs. Powerhouse Bilodeau got me...to sing. I believe she still has some tapes of what her sister Carmen, herself a very good violonist, got our small choir to sing. This could be a story on its own. Meanwhile, my four-year old son was doing well at violin.



*Jacqueline Bilodeau and Ferry de Kerkhove.*

Then we went abroad – a common fate for External Affairs officers – and my son reluctantly moved from one violin teacher to another in Brussels. But clearly something was missing: the Bilodeau drive... Then, two years ago, I found an adult-size violin for \$100 at the well-known Sablons antique market in Brussels and bought it, "just in case", for my son, were he eventually to mature into a player. Of course, upon our return to Ottawa, we registered our children back in the Bilodeau-Lessard school. By that time, my son had grown into a lazy, yet reasonably-talented 9-year-old child and the only solution we found to encourage him to work more at his violin was to have me register – with my Sablons violin – in the same course. I thought this was going

to be leisurely. But Jacqueline's idea of pursuing music lessons was far more aggressive: you had to go through musical theory, sol-fa, group music reading, chamber music, etc.; you had also to pass examinations certified by Laval University in Quebec – in fact, last year, in order to pass my grade 2 violin examinations, I had to drive all the way to Quebec and back because I was away on TD at NATO at the time of the examinations in Hull.

This explains why in that picture, you could see both my son and me and other 'victims' of the Chamber Music program. The irony is that after a year of playing side by side with my son, the teacher, Mrs. Denyse Thibault-Dufresne, decided that the competition was enough and that from now on, we should both be playing on our own... In any event, I think the experiment was worthwhile. Etienne is doing fine. I am trying hard. I feel I can encourage him whenever there is a let-down in his efforts because I am aware of what he is going through... In conclusion I want to pay tribute to the quality of the teaching offered by Denyse Dufresne. She is one of the most demanding, yet understanding and dedicated, musicians a student could ask for. Neither Yehudi Menuhin nor Angèle Dubeau should fear competition from me but at least I have found a way to relax, without hurting my family's ears too much – closing a few doors can do the trick – and still have as a long-term goal to play a few pieces reasonably well.

But violin must be the most difficult instrument to "take-off" with. If I have any advice to give anyone, don't choose violin for your son if you can help it... □

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