

- Anecdotes and personal stories – Yellow
- Perspectives and opinions – Blue
- Factual information or statistics – Green
- Connections to your research topic – Pink

**Mason:**

This is the interview with Jill Denny. Ms. Denny, thank you for having me. I'm going to pass the mic over to you and we can start this.

**Jill:**

Okay, I'm glad to talk to you, Mason.

**Mason:**

What does your average day look like?

**Jill:**

As a teacher in the classroom? I come early before school and work on things like lesson plans and bookkeeping and then I meet with Michael and we go over what we're going to do that day and we zoom out and have a long range view of what's coming and then teach my classes with the students.

**Mason:**

Cool! What is the hardest part of being a choir teacher and how would you overcome that difficulty?

**Jill:**

First of all, I have the best job in the entire world so it doesn't feel hard to me. I love it. I grew up in a music family so I've always been involved in choir from day one. What I love about it is, in fact, the challenges. It's never the same year to year. Even if you do the same song with different kids, it's going to be a different experience. So the things that people might see as hard, the time commitment, the hours that you need to spend preparing and working on it individually, are fun for me. So, yeah.

**Mason:**

That's awesome.

**Jill:**

I think the hardest part for a choir teacher is trying to make sure that you have enough numbers that they keep offering the classes. That's not unique to choir. That's all elective teachers worrying about the customer base, if you will, the clientele, being able to keep doing this great job.

**Mason:**

Okay, how do you try to foster a sense of community and teamwork as a choir teacher?

I do believe every voice counts. So I hope that I am daily working on making everyone feel that they belong, not just that they're included. I think the word inclusion comes with sort of a power, like I could choose to include you or not. But when it really is working is when you say, I belong here. And so I try to do what I can every day to build people up because we're only successful if everyone is successful.

And when we partner and do that, that I think is what builds the community. We're collectively working to make something beautiful, which gives a real strong power of belonging.

That's awesome. What are your biggest rewards you were given as a choir teacher?

I think that most choir teachers measure that with awards and accolades, which I have received many of. But that's not important to me. What's important to me is the kids in front of me and what we're doing every day to be the best that we can be. So the biggest reward for me is when students come back later and they say, wow, this meant something to me. This is how it impacted me as a citizen. I mean, that's my ultimate goal to raise caring citizens. So when they come back and say, this experience impacted me in being able to be a better whatever it is, member of another choir, member of the community, those are my best rewards.

That's awesome. I wanted to talk about your family. How did your parents inspire you to become a musical teacher?

Both of my parents were music teachers. My dad has a PhD, he's passed, had a PhD in music composition. But when I was a young child, he was a band director. He was a high school band director. My mom has multiple masters in music education and vocal performance, and she was the town's high school choir teacher and middle school teacher and elementary teacher. I lived in a very small town, and they were the music team.

And then they just continued to base all of their decisions basically on where's the best music happening and how can we be a part of it. So I think that seeing the joy that music brought them and what it could do for the community, whether it was the church choir or at Baldwin Piano when they started the group piano lessons for their music lab, which my mom did, or going into various special needs schools and using music to bring kids out. I was really witness to a lot of power that music had in making people feel valued, and it just came with so much joy that I went on to do it too.

It's a family business because my aunt was also a choir teacher and my daughter is currently a choir teacher in the Palo Alto District.

That's so cool. What legacy do you want to leave your students as they graduate? What do you want to give them once they move on with their lives?

I want them to know that they matter, that their presence and involvement in things has value, and that not only in choir but in the world in general, we're only successful if everyone is successful. So I hope that they're going on and looking for the good in others and helping to raise that up. Of course we have differences. We celebrate those, but we have to look for things we have in common. That's what I hope. I hope that I'm helping raise global citizens who take care of each other and spread the love, baby.

What is your most memorable memories being a choir teacher?

The moments when everybody is locked in and we're all super focused on the same thing and we're listening to each other and we're blending and really amazing sounds are coming out and you can just feel the electricity sort of going between everyone because we're so in sync.

Okay. In general, how does music in your family influence you?

Well, I spoke to the fact that my parents were very musical and my aunts and uncles, but also my immediate family with son and daughter and now my grandkids. We do a lot of spontaneous music making, a lot of singing. I think that I watch my son now who's not in a music career, but he does a lot of singing and music posting as a source of healing and joy. So that's what I think music can do for people. They don't have to do it as a profession, but listening to it, participating in it, it really helps people feel safe and seen and comfortable.

What are your favorite musical genres or styles to teach and why?

I like variety. I really like music that has really rich chords, a little bit of dissonance with some resolve, but I love music theater. I love classical. I love country. I love Jack Johnson. I love all of the genres. I could never be locked into one. It's the variety that feeds my soul. We feel that.

Let me just make sure this is recording, (*Checks Recording*). What advice would you want to give to a young singer, a choir teacher?

I mean, don't lose sight of the joy. Don't get so caught up in the technique that you forget that you're sharing a piece of yourself, that you're super brave, that you're willing to take this personal risk because when you have an instrument and the instrument makes a mistake, you can be like, oh, that must have been the machine. But with us, it's coming from you and the willingness to take that risk and share joy is amazing. So hold on to the joy, first and foremost.

Yeah, definitely. It gives joy to students, so I totally get that. What do you like to do in your free time?

I love to walk. I like to hike. I like to... (*Somebody walks in to drop something off*) I really am into the outdoors. I like to be outside. I like to... My favorite activity is water. I like snorkeling, scuba diving, swimming. Spend a lot of time with my dog out up in the hills. I like to really be outside.

I used to live in the hills, so that really speaks to me.

Awesome!

What is your all-time favorite song that you keep going back to?

I mean, I don't know that I have an all-time favorite song. I think I have an all-time favorite theme. I like songs about building things together, coming together. I find myself listening to, as I mentioned earlier, a lot of Jack Johnson. I think his Better Together speaks to me, but it's not my all-time favorite. I don't have an all-time favorite. I could never pick one. I hate to disappoint, but I've got a lot of all-time favorites.

I find that really relatable, because I'm the same way.

I can't stick with a genre. No, yes.

This is my last question. It's kind of similar, but... What legacy do you want to give in the x's music program?

I mean, as I mentioned, for the individuals, I want them to go on to take care of others. I think when I retire here, I hope that it continues. I hope that it remains a process-oriented program where we're focusing on the kids in front of us and what we're doing that ends up with a really great product. I would be very sad if this program became very product-focused, where it was about competitions and winning awards. I think that we do win competitions and awards because we pay attention to the students along the way, and this great thing comes out of that. But it comes out of investing in every voice, and that's what I hope is able to continue when I leave.

It's always about building students and letting them show their imagination and creativity.

And shine, yeah. Any closing remarks? *(End of interview remarks)*

Thank you for choosing me to do this, and thank you for choosing choir. I hope you're finding joy in it.

I have a lot of joy working with you.

I love doing this. I'm always happy to do these rehearsals, and I love going to the concerts, even though it's always so stressful. And I would love trying to go up to the higher level. You should give it a go.

You're a great kid. Okay, thank you, Mason. Thank you.

And this is the end. This is going to be a nightmare to transcribe, but you know, this is a super interesting interview. *(Indication at the end of the interview)* This was super helpful.

Thank you. I can't thank you enough. So, I'll stop this. *(Stops Recording)*