

Testimonial—Jean Ritter, RCM Teacher of Distinction Award 2018

By Naomi Wiebe: *20 years old, former student and current friend/mentee of Jean Ritter*

Jean Ritter is one of those people you hope to be like when you grow up. She has a joy that isn't dependent on circumstance and an unwavering hope in things beyond this world.

For the past 15 years I have had the privilege of knowing her and calling her my teacher. When I first met her, she taught me how to play the piano and later helped me to discover the joy of making music. But her role in her student's lives goes far beyond teaching them an instrument. She takes students under her wing and calls us her many "grandkids." We would leave our lessons feeling understood, loved, and known. As well, her encouragement would motivate us to achieve something great. She has always maintained the delicate balance of demanding excellence in our endeavours while showing us grace in the midst of it. She equips us with life skills and instills in us a desire to pursue our goals in music and in life. She listens to our hopes and dreams and believes in us, reminding us of our strengths when we doubted ourselves. She has been a rock and a safe place for her students as we walked the winding roads of adolescence and adulthood. She is so giving of compassion and empathy. She always points us towards the good, reminding us of the truth, time and time again. Her life exemplifies faith, hope, and love—the love of music, of people, and of God.

I have been off at university for a number of years now and my days of piano lessons with Ms. Jean have come and gone. But the relationship doesn't end there. She takes the time to check up on us, genuinely wanting to hear how our day is, and is always ready with her listening ear and her trustworthy advice. She has taught me how to cultivate gratitude and to see beauty in the good, the hard, the ugly, and the everyday and seemingly mundane moments of life.

All who have had the privilege to know Ms. Jean have been changed by simply being in her presence. When I heard that she was nominated for this award of distinction, I smiled because she is so deserving of it. I am so happy that the work she dedicates so much of her time and energy to is being recognized. Thank you, Ms. Jean —For your compassion and your empathy. For taking the time to hear and understand

us. Thank you for all that you are and all you have done in the past 48 years of influencing young people. You have changed the world through shaping generations by simply being you and inspiring us with how you live and love so fully. We are blessed by knowing you.