



Romeo & Juliet

While Natalie and Derek Peterson are known by some as the Romeo and Juliet of Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School, there is far more to their story.

Their tale is one of perseverance, weathering the storms of the recent pandemic and ultimately, succeeding in more ways than one.

In 1983, Natalie Peterson nee Norrish began her life as a Bunbury Grammar boarder. While at School, Natalie and Derek became childhood sweethearts and after graduating in 1985, the romance continued.

The couple moved to Perth for university studies with Natalie completing her nursing degree and Derek commenced an engineering degree. But Derek was quickly lured to the audio visual industry and the appeal of working. His aptitude for audio was central in his role at Purvisonic Sound while Natalie worked as a nurse at St John of God.

After working in Perth for four years, they both yearned for the country lifestyle. Taking a job at GWN7 as a Sound Technician

provided the perfect opportunity for the couple to return. In only a week of returning, Natalie was working at St John of God's Bunbury hospital in a nursing role. *"I was using more generic nursing skills and enjoyed the change. It provided a greater variety of work, and it was a nice way to reconnect with the community,"* she said.

This connection and being part of the local community has been one of the keys to their business success. After years of working in the audio visual industry, scribbling down ideas on scraps of paper, Derek launched his company Totally Sound with his first gig the Bunbury Christmas Carols in 1997.

Since then, the business has burgeoned from an owner-operator model to a company which at its peak, employed nine staff. In 2004, Totally Sound won the Telstra Small Business Award (Micro Category) for Western Australia. Behind the story of success though, lies years of sacrifice and long hours. *"Starting our own business was a gamble but we threw everything at it: We lived and breathed it,"* Natalie said.

Initially, Natalie had a peripheral role in the operations of Totally Sound but this reached a turning point. It was a moment of epiphany, juggling a nursing job while also being a mum of three young children. *"I realised that it was too much, and I moved into a full-time role in the business in 2011,"* she said.

Since the transition, Natalie and Derek have passionately managed their business together.

Like many small businesses, Totally Sound faced a challenging year in 2020 and their company is still feeling the impact of COVID-19. Natalie said, *"Diversification over the last ten years provided means for pivoting the business during the pandemic. This diversification into audio-visual, lighting, staging and importantly commercial installation ultimately saved the business."*

A flexible and responsive approach, is part of working in the entertainment industry. *"We see all walks of life and experience so much, from chefs to film and rock stars, through to wonderful community events, including working closely with a lot of the local schools. We meet a broad range of people from different industries, and it is an amazing space to work in,"* she said.

Derek and Natalie are the proud parents of three children - Shenae, Holly and Shaun - who all attended the School. In their own way, each child has built careers and lives, adding to the success story of the Peterson family and providing the fairy tale end to the Romeo and Juliet of Bunbury Grammar.

Ms Ruth Walker :: School Community Co-ordinator

