Don’t Stop Believin’
The Story of Brandon Blatchford, 12
by Terry Weber Mangos

Photo Credit: Matt Parker
FOREWORD

2023 is fast approaching. In 2023 we will recognize 400+ years of history in Gloucester. Our mission is to tell the stories of Gloucester’s people, not only from long ago but from today. Who are today’s interesting, unique and warmhearted people? Who are the ones who give this city its heart and soul? Who are the newest arrivals to our city? Who among us—right now—is overcoming challenges, contributing to the community, and chasing their dreams? In this story, you’ll learn about someone chasing their dreams at the young age of 12.
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Remember the name, Brandon Blatchford. Around age six, his parents, Dana and Liz, were sitting on their couch relaxing when they overheard Brandon singing in another room. But he wasn’t just singing; he was belting out the chorus of “Don’t Stop Believin’” by the rock group Journey. At that moment, Dana and Liz looked at each other and knew it was—a moment to remember.

Dana was so impressed he introduced Brandon to more music, including the music of Queen. Dana could do that because he’s a singer and musician himself. He knows his music. Soon Brandon was singing “We Will Rock You,” but again, not just singing it; he was impersonating Queen’s lead singer Freddie Mercury.

“Even at a young age, Brandon was inspired by watching the Live Aid concert featuring Freddie Mercury,” said Dana. “He wishes he wrote ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ because he loves the variety of music in the piece.”

Brandon also began piano lessons during the same year his parents noticed his singing talent. It all started when his mom Liz was walking down the street in Gloucester and heard piano music coming from a house. Inside was Renee Dupuis, a singer and songwriter. Liz contacted Renee, and soon Brandon found himself in front of a keyboard. By eight years old, it became clear that Brandon preferred to sing, and Renee remained as his singing coach.

In the years that followed, Brandon sang in public with his dad. Now at 12, Brandon sings at local bars and events with one or both of his parents always close by. Dana and Liz manage Brandon’s career and book his gigs at the Rhumb Line, Minglewood, and Harbor Loop concerts.
Brandon has also collaborated with local talent acts, including the Bob Davis Trio, John Jerome, Frank Gentile, and his singing teacher Renee Dupuis.

“It was a pleasure, playing with Brandon at the Rhumb Line,” said singer John Jerome. “Brandon is a super talented singer with a very bright future ahead of him. Most important, he is kind, grateful, and humble.”

According to Brandon’s parents, the local community has enthusiastically supported Brandon’s interest in music and art. Like many kids, Brandon also has a presence on social media and is developing a following on sites like TikTok and ReverbNation.
“Brandon’s videos are pretty popular online,” said Dana. “In one of the videos where Brandon is singing a song from Queen, Freddie Mercury’s sister (Kashmira Bulsara) messaged me saying, “Wow, talented!!”

Freddie Mercury’s sister Kashmira Bulsara’s message about Brandon singing the songs of Queen

In addition to Freddie Mercury and Queen, Brandon enjoys the music of John Lennon, Coldplay, Slipknot, and Metallica.

Brandon and his friends recently formed their own band named Kicked Off the Bus, with Brandon as the lead singer. They perform cover songs and intend to write their own music one day.

Members of the Kicked Off the Bus band from left to right, Sam Pallazolla, 16, guitar; James Sanfilippo, 16, bass guitar; Henry Goulart, 11, drummer; and Brandon, 12, lead vocals, 2022
Brandon’s talents reach beyond music into art. He draws, paints, and sculpts. A common theme is faces.

Brandon’s spontaneous chalk drawing of Freddie Mercury, 2020

Brandon had just watched a movie featuring Dr. Strange (a Marvel comic books character) and was inspired to draw the character with just colored pens and pencils. He drew it in less than 30 minutes. 2022

Like most kids, Brandon likes horror and fantasy movies. This is his rendition of Frankenstein. 2022
What explains Brandon’s singing and artistic talent? Is it a simple case of “like father, like son?” Brandon’s dad Dana is also a singer, and although he is not in a band anymore, he plays and writes music at home. His former band, Jagged Edge, was once popular on the local circuit, and they performed at Great Woods (now known as the Xfinity Center) while Dana was still in high school.

“There is certainly talent in both sides of our family tree, and Brandon inherited some of that talent,” said Liz. “But, we also believe Brandon has a gift. He has a natural way with his voice, ease in how he sings... just the power of it. He can produce sophisticated art in minutes. It can’t really be explained.”

Dana Blatchford (Brandon’s Dad) singing at Great Woods in 1991 with his former band, Jagged Edge

Dana and his wife co-manage their son’s music career, work full-time, and care for their older son Ryan, who is talented in high school track and a good student.

“We have two smart and talented boys we love and care for... and drive around!” said Liz with a smile. “Juggling our schedules has been more of a challenge lately, but we wouldn’t have it any other way. Communication is key.”

Liz and Dana are both grateful that everyone they have collaborated with has been supportive. They are also happy to report that Brandon’s schoolwork

Blatchford family, left to right: Dana, Brandon, Liz and Ryan
has not suffered. Brandon, who just entered the O’Maley Innovation Middle School, is enjoying school, particularly his involvement in art activities and the drama club.

“My only concern is people trying to take advantage of Brandon,” said Liz. “That is why it’s so important for us to be totally involved at every practice and every event. His safety and happiness come first.”

When asked about his goals for 2023, Brandon replied, “Goals for 2023? I would like to get some gigs over the bridge. I love singing in Gloucester, but I think it’s time to venture beyond the island.”
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Blatchford family would like to thank their family, friends, the Gloucester Public Schools, and the music and art community for supporting Brandon. Brandon would also like to thank Ms. Jessica Haskell, his social studies teacher, for helping his band gather toys for a Christmas toy drive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry Weber Mangos is a writer, publicist, and content developer. She’s appeared in the Boston Globe, Providence Journal, Gloucester Daily Times, Cape Ann Beacon, and more. Terry also happens to be the Gloucester 400+ Stories Project Leader and enjoys helping others tell their stories.

ABOUT THE COVER PHOTO

Brandon Blatchford, 11, singing “House of the Rising Sun” by the Animals at Hampton Beach Talent Competition, August 27, 2022. Photo Credit: Matt Parker