

GIVING BACK FROM THE

Heart

By Lorraine Leslie

It was a cool morning in March when I crawled out of bed, opened the blind and thought to myself "what will today bring?" What will I learn?" "Who will I meet?" I say my affirmations as I walk, still half asleep into my office and turn on my computer. I like to download any email messages that I might have received from late afternoon of the previous day so I can start my business day with a fresh outlook. I then stroll into the kitchen, plug in the kettle to make a pot of tea and feed Magic and Cuddles the cats before heading for a shower. But this morning I returned to my office... something was telling me inside to look at my emails first.

The message I read from a total stranger was about to make my days ahead both inspiring and intriguing. I was headed on a journey to meet a woman whose story I would hold close to my heart for the rest of my life. The email was from the son of a single mother who has an amazing story to share with the world. James (her son) had picked up a copy of *Women with Vision Business Magazine* on one of his ski days in Collingwood.

This is what was written...

"Hi, my name is James. I'm a ski pro in the Collingwood area, and that is where I picked up your publication. I know that I am not the intended audience but my compliments just the same. It caught my eye because I would consider my Mother to be a 'Woman with Vision'. Her name is Carol Ann Cole. She fits the same profile as some the women featured in your magazine. She is a successful business woman, whose career path changed with the onset of cancer (I'm not suggesting however that your magazine is only about cancer survivors). She has now become a successful fundraiser. She won awards that include The Terry Fox Award as well as being named to the Order of Canada. I have learned that women enjoy other women's success



photo by
Sue Mills
Nova Scotia

stories, and I enjoy bragging about my mother. I am very proud of her and I am going to tell her of your magazine because I believe that it is unique. Congratulations on all your present and future successes. James Scott"

I replied to the sender and awaited his response. In my email I suggested that James might like to write an article about his mother and submit it to *Women with Vision*...

A few days went by with no reply. As James had included his mother's website www.carolanncole.com, I set out to find her email address. I sent her a note with the email attachment that James had sent to me. Carol Ann's reply was within 24 hours and before we knew it we were sitting in the Crown Plaza Hotel on Front Street in downtown Toronto having lunch and getting to know each other.

Carol Ann, one of four girls, was born in the small town of Wilmot, Nova Scotia on March 28, 1946. Carol Ann's parents had moved to Wilmot and built a small house before she was born. Little did they know that their four active daughters would share two bedrooms,

toys, and hand-me-down clothes. They were a happy family with a mother that adored them and a father that worked hard to give them as many comforts as he could. Life seemed to be going smoothly until Carol Ann reached the age of nine and started to feel a little different than her sisters. It wasn't a medical, mental, or physical problem, she just felt different. She started to recognize that her father treated her differently than her sisters. She was asked to do different chores - things that a boy might do. Her father would speak to her differently and the two of them would get into confrontations and yelling matches.

As a result of this Carol Ann started to stutter. She felt her stuttering was making her feel inadequate with her peers. One day she followed through on the advice of her mother and spoke with her teacher to see if there was anything she could do to get rid of her stutter. The teacher worked with Carol Ann on her public speaking by letting her read aloud in the class. The teacher encouraged Carol Ann to understand that if she set her mind to something she could accomplish it. Carol Ann went on to enter public speaking contests and even won some. Little did Carol Ann know that conquering her fear of public speaking would evolve into a career later in her adult life?

As Carol Ann grew into her teenager years her relationship with her father became very strained. Her mother became very concerned, and soon after Carol Ann graduated from high school at the age of 18, her mother made arrangements for Carol Ann to move to North Bay to live with her aunt.

A new life, a new town and a chance to have a career was all Carol Ann could think about.

Carol Ann's Aunt was very involved with the community and was able to get her a job interview at a local Bank. She also had Carol Ann fill out an application for a job at Bell Canada. Luck was on her side and after her interview with the bank manager, she was hired. Carol Ann however, did receive a call from Bell Canada for an interview but she politely told them she had already accepted a position. She continued to learn as much as she could on a daily basis. Her focus on having a career gave meaning to her life. After weeks had gone by, Bell Canada called to ask Carol Ann again to come in for an interview. Her aunt felt that she would have a better career and more advancement opportunities with Bell Canada and encouraged her to take them up on it. Soon after, Carol Ann gave her notice at the bank.

Life for Carol Ann was going well in North Bay, however back at home her family was falling apart. Her father eventually left her mother and her three sisters. Her mother had never worked outside the home and desperately tried to make ends meet. Soon Carol Ann started to climb the corporate ladder and was able to send some financial assistance home to her mother and sisters.

As many young women do, Carol Ann fell in love and married

in 1967 and became a mother to James in 1969. After five years in an unsuccessful marriage she realized that her career was her passion and vision. The transfers at Bell started to come; new towns, new positions, management and more money! Carol Ann was on a roll and James was right there beside her all the way.

Carol Ann recalls, "In the 1960's a woman often had to do more to be considered equal with her male counterparts". In Kingston Ontario she learned her first lesson and was happy to play the game to prove she deserved to be there. "My boss at the time was very *helpful* in pointing out the types of committees I should be sitting on. As a female manager I knew I had to take it one step further. At any one given time I worked with at least four groups - the Business and Professional Women's Club, the Local Council of Women, the Board of Trade, and the Junior Chamber of Commerce. I was also involved in Career Day for women at Queen's University and tried to mentor women considering a career in business. I wanted everyone to share my commitment to a career. In fact, I wanted everyone to work for Bell! I loved working with all these groups. Additionally, it gave me a chance to connect with other women in the community."

With every promotion came another challenge. Personal image, staff supervision, complaints and reprimands all became part of the job. Carol Ann became known as Bell's country bumpkin. Not

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Giving Back From the Heart

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only had she come from Bell's Northeast area, but she was also from another province, which seemed to be sufficient reason to make fun of her.

Move after move, transfer after transfer – Kingston to Ottawa/Ottawa to Toronto/Toronto to Montreal/Montreal back to Toronto.

The ladder was getting higher and higher

In 1981, with 300 people on her team she decided that she wanted to learn all of their names. "This was called a 'soft skill' at the time and not considered important, but I felt it was critical to know something about each of my team-mates." The personal touch was to pay off big-time.

Next it was to Montreal as the Director of Labour Relations where she would be negotiating contracts for Bell with the Canadian Telephone Employees Association followed by another move back to Toronto. Between 1984 and 1989 Carol Ann had a number of jobs in the Toronto area.

"All were great jobs where I worked with wonderful people, but they were all the same level. Then, in 1988, it almost happened.

I felt certain I was the perfect candidate for one of the two VP jobs available in Ontario, for which only two of us were in the running. I couldn't lose this time. Could I?"

Carol Ann wanted to celebrate, she had finally made it but her source had told her nothing would be final until the following week. The following week she was notified that she did not get the position. Carol Ann was devastated. She disappeared for a month. She would not go to work, would not return phone calls and would see no one. A good friend and confidant met with her and told her this nonsense had gone on long enough and that they couldn't cover for her much longer.

"I had been so concerned with losing the VP job that I didn't stop to consider that my current behaviour could be damaging to my entire career. This had been a huge mistake on my part, especially for a female climbing the corporate ladder in a male-dominated environment. It made me look emotional and vulnerable – two characteristics I fought against showing."

"In May 1989 my boss accompanied me to the President's office where I learned that someone was being transferred and there was an opening for a VP job and it was being offered to me!"

Through determination and courage you can accomplish your goals if you put your mind, and heart to it



was founded to offer business women a networking venue in which they can provide support for one another and develop new business connections. Through this dynamic networking opportunity attendees will receive motivation, inspiration, advice and mutual support to help them take their business & lives in general to the highest possible level.

Guests & New Members are always welcome.

Luncheons: Each luncheon begins at 12 noon & lasts for one and a half hours. Each community has its own networking day and location.

Cost: Members \$20; non members \$25. Reserved seating only. Contact the District Coordinator no later than 48 hours prior to the *Women with Vision* Networking Luncheon at the location of your choice.

Usual Agenda:

12:00	Registration & Networking
12:15	Lunch
12:30	Announcements & Introductions
12:50	Guest Speaker
1:15	Q & A
1:30	Back to work...

Membership: Membership year runs Sept. 1st to Aug. 31st. Annual dues are \$75 for business owners and \$10 for employees. Business owner membership dues are pro-rated for those joining throughout the year.

Members receive:

- Advance notification of upcoming luncheons via email
- Reduced luncheon fee
- Direct mailing of *Women with Vision* Business Magazine
- Workshop and conference information
- Opportunity to display/distribute business promotional materials
- *Women with Vision* lapel pin

Networking Luncheon Locations

Collingwood:
2nd Thursday each month
Coordinator: **Lorraine 705-445-1891** at Cranberry Golf Resort

Barrie:
2nd Tuesday each month
Coordinator: **Tanya 705-835-5250**

Brampton:
2nd Tuesday each month
Coordinators: **Roberta 416-721-9423** or **Indira 905-799-1177**

Bolton:
3rd Thursday each month
Coordinator: **Sandra 905-451-6031 ext: 246**

Orangeville:
4th Thursday each month
Coordinators:
Deb 519-925-4398 Sue 519-925-0818 Leslie 519-938-9942

Meaford:
3rd Wednesday each month
Coordinator: **Alice 519-538-0066**

HEAD OFFICE:
156 Brophy's Lane, Collingwood ON L9Y 3Z2
P: 705-445-1891 F: 705-445-7153
womenwithvision@hotmail.com

After all that Carol Ann had been through, on May 8, 1989 she became a Vice President and had reached her goal – albeit three years later than she had planned. Finally she would be in a position where she could make a difference. Carol Ann could help the customers and could offer influence and mentorship to many in the company. She could open doors for others. When her promotion was announced officially, her office was flooded with messages and flowers. She could no longer send personal notes to everyone since her "soft skill" list was now over 3000 strong.



Carol Ann receiving the Order of Canada for Volunteerism 2000 from Canadian General Governor Adrian Clarkson

"Becoming one of the first female Vice Presidents changed my life in many ways, good and bad. I worked longer hours and was proud to be a workaholic. My commitment to Bell was endless. I loved talking with students about careers at Bell and giving speeches on being a woman in a non-traditional role. It was so rewarding to speak on behalf of Bell. Meetings with celebrities (i.e. a chance encounter with Pierre Trudeau) were highlights I'll never forget."

And then Carol Ann's world came crashing down

Within days both Carol Ann and her mother were diagnosed with breast cancer. While Carol Ann was able to beat the deadly disease the loss of her mother a year later had a monumental impact on her life.

Not knowing how she would handle returning to work – the stares, the talking behind her back, the stress and strain – Carol Ann considered maybe it was time to retire. After lengthy discussions and calculations she made her decision, and at the age of 47 after 28 and a half years she took her leave from Bell.

Carol Ann's devotion to her mother gave her strength to carry on, to find a new path and to follow yet another journey – find a way to give back to the cancer community through volunteer work.

One day after visiting her father back home in Nova Scotia she walked into a store with a dear friend and discovered the *Worry Hearts*, a small pewter heart that you rub in times of stress, she knew she'd found the way to give back to the cancer community. Within days she had idea upon idea and so a vision grew...

With the permission and support of the original creator of the piece of jewellery, Carol Ann and May Ocean (owner of OceanArt Pewter) altered the design and renamed them *Comfort Hearts*, Carol Ann created the *Comfort Heart Initiative*. She got everyone she could think of involved with selling *Comfort Hearts*. She had executives, vice presidents and corporations buying them. She approached numerous cancer related organizations to promote the *Comfort Heart* and to date has raised over one million dollars for cancer research. The little piece of pewter has become a talisman

for over 160,000 Canadians and their families. Carol Ann saw an opportunity to keep giving back to those who helped her along her journey both personally and career wise. Carol Ann is now an International Speaker (the third of her four goals after retirement – number four was to write a book about her career – called *Comfort Heart*).

For Carol Ann's initiative, and in her mother's memory, she has received *The Terry Fox Award*, she has been named the *1999 Woman of the Year* by Jewish Women International of Toronto, The Canadian Auto Workers Women's Networking Committee presented her with the CAW Eastern Women's Networking Region Award as *Canadian Woman of the Year 1999*, and she was named to the MacLeans Annual Honour Roll as well as being awarded the *Order of Canada for Volunteerism in 2000*.

Having met Carol Ann, heard her speak and read her book, I can sincerely say she is a mentor, an inspiration, a fabulous mother and an ever-lasting friend. Cheers to you Carol Ann – well done – may your glass always be full and your journey be bursting with the joys of life. To James, thank you for introducing me to your miraculous mother, I will be forever grateful my friend.



**Keep those calls, emails,
and letters coming!**



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share with other*

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