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EDITORIAL: A good news story

Working in the Town of Shelburne has been an interesting experience for me so far.

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Wendy Soloduik. I am an Alliston resident and the mother of four (19, 13, 12 and 9).

I have been working in the newspaper industry for 10 years, although I attended the University of Toronto in the hopes of becoming a lawyer. And later, I graduated Humber College, North Campus, with a certificate (with Honours) in Fitness Leadership. Although my educational background is unrelated to my current profession, I know I'm exactly where I am supposed to be. And that's where our paths now cross.

I got my start with Simcoe?York Printing & Publishing, now a division of London Publishing, 10 years ago. I was working answering phones in a taxi company and my son, Logan, was not even one at the time.

I read a classified ad looking for a ?photographic journalist? at The Times of New Tecumseth and Adjala?Tosorontio and decided to apply. My resume was diverse ? prior to my pregnancy I had worked in the disaster restoration industry selling air movers and chemicals to clean up after fires, floods and mould remediation. I had also worked booking carpet cleaning, as a server in an Italian restaurant and as a check-out girl in a grocery store ? but it was my cover letter that got the editor's attention.

It wasn't the enthusiastic tone in which I wrote, or the attention to spelling and grammar, it was my last name. Soloduik (pronounced sol-a-duke).

I was called in for an interview.

?Are you Carol's daughter,? the editor asked ? a man who would eventually become my mentor and a father figure to me.

?Yes, I am,? I said.

My mother had been a business owner (butcher shop), a Lioness (now girls are allowed to play with Lions), an auxiliary police officer and a community friend in our hometown, Tottenham, for many years.

?I have a lot of resumes on my desk you know,? said the editor, eyeballing me for a reaction. ?But I'm willing to give you a chance. There's a community function coming up next week. Go and take pictures. If you don't manage to completely destroy my paper I'll give you another assignment.?

I was happy to take the job, despite his obvious concern. After all, I was beating out journalists with Bachelors Degrees (I didn't finish my degree at U of T).

?Perfect, tell me what you want me to capture and I'm on the job,? I said.

With a slight look of disgust, the editor turned to me and said, ?It's sink or swim for you, honey. This isn't a journalist training program.? And with that, I was shown the door.

I went to my first assignment not having a clue what I was doing, or even if I had the right to represent the newspaper officially.

I took many shots that day. It was a family event, so there were lots of interesting things to photograph ? kids fishing for prizes, melting ice cream cones, painted faces. A veritable rainbow of colours.

I turned in the finished project, quite please with myself.

?Ok, this is fine,? said the editor. Closing the pictures that appeared on his screen from my camera card as quickly as they popped up. ?Next week, I want you to write about the trees they cut down at the local high school to make room for a new Hydro transistor box.?

Um...ok. At the time I didn't know about Town policy, arbourists, reforestation, or how to angle a story. To back up even further I didn't know how to conduct an interview, turn that interview into an article, or even how to go about contacting the group(s) involved.

I did the article. It sucked. But somehow they hired me anyway. I gave my 2-week notice at the taxi company and settled in to our Beeton office.

Three years ago, the editor retired and I unofficially assumed his role in the company. My responsibilities include reporting on events, editing incoming submissions, piecing the newspaper together on production days, photo editing, maintaining the website and Facebook page and managing a staff of reporters. It's a busy ? but fulfilling ? career.

Earlier this year, I also took over as the editor of our Innisfil Scope newspaper. An established paper that covers the area between Cookstown and Alcona, from the south end of Barrie to the north end of Bradford.

My gig got bigger, but I was ready to set away from the street beat and be in the office more.

Recently (three weeks ago) my management team approached me to take over the editing of the Shelburne paper as well.

Here's where things get interesting...when I took over Innisfil, I didn't feel a need to make my presence physically known in that community. The paper was thriving and ran like clockwork. I could do what I needed to do from Beeton. But when they asked my to edit Shelburne, I knew I had to make a presence in your community. I needed to get in my car, and walk the streets there. Flip the ?Open' sign over in the window of our office and meet and greet with business owners, town staff, council members and residents.

This will be my third week editing your community newspaper, and I feel good about the changes we've made, and the changes yet to come.

I may not have finished school to become a lawyer ? I'm also not a practicing personal trainer, for that matter ? but this is one project I intend to see through.

Thank you for welcoming me into your community and I look forward to sharing your good news stories.

By Wendy Soloduik