

We are women – hear us roar!

By Elaine Elias

Linda Whetham is a multifaceted woman with purpose and passion. Early family values and a lifetime of experiences have honed her drive, creating a leader and a lady capable of surmounting an array of challenges.

When she was a young woman, Linda arrived in Preston (a section of Cambridge) with three children in tow under five, having left Toronto and an ex-husband behind. Help from her parents afforded an opportunity to settle into home and family life.

A later, second marriage to Glen Whetham brought three additional children into the mix and they added a seventh child of their own. Robbins Coffee Shop in Preston afforded the means to raise their large family, both parents having their Complete Bakers qualification.

Glen later switched to a plumbing and heating business and Linda became the woman behind the man, juggling sales, service, and office/payroll duties for fourteen employees. As Glen began downsizing the business in the past couple of years, Linda progressed deeply into politics.

Linda's honesty, compassion for others and self-truths all have shored up her foundation. Today she is in a key, pivotal position and is leaving a three-term, city councillor's office to apply her influence and wisdom in a mayoral election. Her

campaign strengths and endurance are the same ones she needed to raise three young children, equality and justice the same beliefs doled out as parent and city councillor, and benevolence for people the same as applied to citizenry or for a

stranger beside her. She draws no lines, makes no comparisons.

Throughout all of Linda's roles she has mastered a slew of challenges, and if elected, those identical qualities will shine on as a fresh leader and spokesperson for that original community first accepting her as a young mother and new resident.

Musing on the origin of her values, she mentioned her childhood. "Thinking of my own and my sister's experiences, I realize we were raised by parents who mainly allowed us to bring up ourselves without being overprotective, and permitted us to learn to be streetwise." In the next breath, a quiet smile on her face and with pride in her voice, she said, "My politics came from Dad – we all had to vote. No exceptions!"

Change in the 1980's mirrored a contentious issue and taught her how the



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magnitude of a city's decision could impact common folk. Cambridge levied a huge property tax increase and Linda went on the revolt, of course with many others, but collectively they reversed council's decision. Rebellion exposed in her an unknown brewing passion: the desire to have a public purse administered equitably and rightfully.

Transition, yet another change, has now left Linda with an empty nest. "The kids are all on their way and this has become the best time of my life," she said, indicating less hands-on family responsibility and a favourable time to proceed further into public life. "I would have liked to have been involved in politics earlier but my duties to family and business loomed large. But I can do that now!" If elected as Mayor, the role will provide Linda a venue for her personal stamp of integrity.

Challenge plus change add up to complications and she has techniques to cope. Frustration of stress and time management are universal and she learned that, "Talking out situations with close friends and family, who fundamentally understand me and the problem, helps me sort out what to do and how to do it." With time constraints, she confessed, "My family lives on crock-pot food."

Multitasking is useful along with her treasured Blackberry, or, "The office in my pocket," as she dubbed it. Contrastingly, she doesn't delegate duties. Linda anticipated a new learning curve within the mayoral office and took a four month course as 'Acting Mayor' plus has chaired a multitude of committees to build relevant experiences into her dossier. "I will also sit back, listen and simply absorb new information before proceeding."

If unelected, Linda will leave politics, focusing on volunteerism with service clubs: The Stroke Recovery Association, the Food Bank, Kiwanis and 4H Fall Fair.

She'll increase that list and likely join a political party to help others campaign or advocate important issues. When Glen retires from fixing leaky pipes, they'll travel Europe to experience first hand the many cultures, peoples, traditions, and foods of societies lying outside a Canadian perspective.

Future role changes will always exist but two that won't alter are that of grandmother to five young ones and assisting their aging parents, situations that will pull her toward the next phase of family life.

Linda's advice for women blossoms from her personal experiences. "Live life to the fullest and tap into other people at the place and time where each currently exists." On personal growth, she said, "Educate yourself to become financially solvent and independent." Another gem was, "Keep yourself healthy in all ways," and then added, "As you are today, show self-acceptance, self-kindness." Ultimately, she believes that, "It's never too late to be whatever you are choosing to be in life."

"We are Women – hear us Roar!" Linda laughed and gave a nod to Helen Reddy.

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