

Defining Success

Celebrating the Personal and Professional Journeys of Ottawa's Most Accomplished Women

by Tanya Springer Photographs by Paul Couvrette

In the fall of 2008, *Ottawa Life Magazine* committed the spring cover story to the most successful women in the city. Staff dispersed and the search began. Emails were exchanged and potential candidates were nominated. Within a month we realized that we needed to come back to the drawing board and better define our criteria. We knew some things were certain: we wanted to present readers with a selection of women who came from very different backgrounds and professions, each of whom call the National Capital Region home. Beyond those requirements, the only adjective we were using to describe this elusive group was 'successful'.

It's been widely suggested that success be defined as the completion of anything and everything intended. In theory, this might be an acceptable interpretation but it seems to be

a little outdated. How likely is it in this day and age, that a 17 or 18 year old freshman will start off on a direct and deliberate career path or personal mission, and never once experience a change in course? More often than not, twists and turns occur, footing is lost, and paths are derailed. It's more appropriate for us to define success as an ongoing journey, rather than a final destination.

The 6 intelligent and inspirational women that grace the cover of this issue have walked very different career paths. What they do share in common is an appetite for accomplishment and an astounding dedication to bettering their community. Their journeys are inspiring and efforts exemplary. However, the best part of these stories is that each is far from its final chapter.



Dr.

Linda

Duxbury

Professor, Sprott School of Business, Carleton University

Describing Dr. Linda Duxbury as an effervescent and high energy woman would be a flagrant understatement. She's the witty banter that charms the checkout line, the break of silence in an uncomfortable elevator; she is the very antithesis of the dull economics professor you wish you'd never had. The indefatigable Duxbury is a highly acclaimed, nationally celebrated professor at the prestigious Sprott School of Business, Carleton's specialty institute. She is published widely in both academic and practitioner literatures, and is considered to be an internationally renowned expert on work-life issues.

While her list of professional accomplishments can truly be credited to a genuine love of teaching, Duxbury wasn't always set on this path. She left her hometown of London, Ontario for the University of Waterloo, where she received an undergraduate diploma and an M.A.Sc. in Chemical Engineering. Obviously comfortable and capable in a science-based environment, it was the experience of being a residence don that influenced her to steer away from

intensive sciences, and the isolating reality of associated professions. She recognised her natural ability and need to engage others, and decided that a PhD in management sciences would best suit her new found professional ambition of teaching.

Upon finishing her PhD, Duxbury embarked on a 14-month journey around the globe. With her was John, an engineer she dated throughout her time at Waterloo, and the man to whom she has been happily wed for the past 23 years. Duxbury unquestionably credits John for where she is today, both literally and figuratively. Upon return from travelling the two made a pact that whichever one received a job offer first would take it, and that the other would dutifully follow. Linda remains in playful disbelief that John got that first call, but has since become grateful. After-all, it was Carleton that extended the offer to John, and sealed the couple's fate.

It didn't take long for Linda to find her place in Ottawa. She quickly rose up the ranks of Carleton's business school, holding the Imperial Life Chair in Women and Management from 1992 to 1996, and directing the Carleton Centre for Research on Education on Women and Work from 1996 to 1999. She has since been appointed to the Fryer Commission on Labour-Management Relations in the Federal Government (1999) and been awarded the Public Service Citation from the Association of Public Service Executives for her work on supportive work environments (2000). Her list of impressive accolades is lengthy, and includes the Canadian Workplace Wellness Pioneer Award, the Canadian Pension and Benefits National Speaker Award, the Carleton University Student's Association Award for Teaching Excellence, The Sprott MBA Student Society "Best Teacher Award", and the Toastmasters International Communication and Leadership Award, for her "outstanding personal contribution to our community as a powerful communicator and a dedicated leader".

While her list of accomplishments is obviously impressive, many would argue that the more admirable aspect of Linda's success has been her ability to do it all without owning or operating a Blackberry (insert gasp here). Just last year, she caved in and got her first cell-phone, but only because her daughter was leaving home for university. Linda's philosophy is one that many of us could learn from. Quite simply, she is either working, or she is not. When on campus, and in her office, Dr. Duxbury is dedicated to her work, but when she leaves at the end of each day she refuses to cart anything work related with her, contacts and communication included. This practically forces Linda to create pockets of free time that elude so many of us. She and her husband combine quality time with practical time for health by signing up for fitness and yoga classes together and taking active annual month-long vacations where laptops simply aren't allowed.

How does she manage such a perfect balance between personal and professional successes? It might have something to do with her co-authoring a major Health Canada report entitled *The National Study on Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle*. Drawing from interviews with 31,000 working Canadians, this report is being called the most extensive Canadian survey ever completed. Crackberry abusers across Ottawa are marvelling while reading this and thinking; "I'd read it, but I just haven't got the time!"

View Linda's report on the Health Canada website under the 'Environmental and Workplace Health's section: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/index-eng.php> ■



Kerry Pither

Author, Advocate, Commentator

Immediately following the attacks of 9/11, while most Ottawans remained glued to their television sets, all Kerry Pither could think about was how people in her community might become scapegoats. Never one to hold back on her instincts, she hung a large red and white sign in her window that read, “I support my Arab and Muslim neighbours”. Little did she know, Pither would dedicate the next six years of her life to the post 9/11 human rights fall-out.

Born in London, England, Kerry’s family moved to Ottawa when she was just two years old. She grew up in the west end of the city, and eventually received a degree in Communications from the University of Ottawa. She became interested in international human rights issues at a young age, and credits her grandmother, Liu Ming Ching, for her activist spirit. Pither spent a great deal of time in the late 90s volunteering with the East Timor Alert Network (ETAN) to help expose how Canadian trade relations with Indonesia’s military dictatorship were helping to fuel human rights abuses. She was crucial in organizing national speaking tours for East Timor and Indonesian activists, and participated in many rallies, conferences, conventions and education programs and campaigns throughout this time. Following East Timor’s successful 1999 self-determination referendum, Pither continued her social justice work through an array of local, regional, national and international issues.

Most Canadians remember the horrifying story of Maher Arar, the Syrian-Canadian telecommunications engineer whose deportation and torture made him a tragic symbol of post 9/11 human rights transgressions. During a stopover at John F. Kennedy Airport in September 2002, Arar was detained by US officials who had been told by Canadian agencies that he had links to al-Qaeda (a claim that would later be proven false). He was eventually deported to Syria, despite his ownership of a Canadian passport. This story had special significance here in Ottawa, as Arar, his wife, and their two young children resided in our city’s west end, and were active members of the community.

In May of 2003, eight months into his detainment, Arar’s wife approached Pither for help. She of course agreed, and

spent the next five months working closely with Amnesty International and various other international organizations, playing a crucial coordinating role in the campaign for Maher’s release. He was brought home in October of that same year.

Pither worked alongside Amnesty to debrief Arar about his experiences and campaign for a public inquiry. She spent the next 3 years researching and authoring extensive chronologies about Arar and the three other Canadian citizens who had been detained in Syria, all of whom were tortured and interrogated with questions and information supplied by Canadian investigators. Shouldering a great burden and responsibility to educate the Canadian public, Pither felt compelled to turn her research and interviews into a book. She entitled it, *Dark Days: The Story of Four Canadians Tortured in the Name of Fighting Terror*. It was published by Penguin Group in August 2008, and was named a ‘Book of the Year’ by Amazon.ca. Pither, who has found the writing and publication process to be very cathartic, has pledged all sales profits to Amnesty International Canada.

Is she an advocate? Undeniably. But what Pither is adamant in clarifying is that her advocacy is as much about our rights as it is about the victims’. She explains, “I am not an advocate or spokesperson for any of the men whose stories I tell in my book. I am an advocate for their rights — and their rights are our rights — these are basic human rights. They didn’t have to be innocent, or even likeable for me to advocate for their right to be free from torture, or for their/our right to get answers about why they were tortured.”

A self-diagnosed workaholic, Pither playfully suggests that she’s had a book instead of a baby. When not discussing her work, Pither’s energetic and lively persona makes for light and effortless conversation. She is glad to have stayed in Ottawa throughout her life, but wishes she made more time for what she loves best; running along the canal. A former marathon runner, Pither claims that training taught her that she can push harder, even when she thinks there might be no steam left; a lesson that has since proven to be very helpful in her professional life.

What’s next for Kerry Pither? Well, she has just fulfilled a quest to put a copy of her book in the hands of every one of Canada’s 308 Members of Parliament, and is working to ensure Arar receives a proper apology from Canadian officials. She has also promised herself a well deserved vacation in 2009. Don’t expect it to last long though – this feisty and fresh crusader knows no limit, and it’s fairly likely her lone ‘child’ will be expecting a sibling sometime soon.

To find out more about Kerry, her book and her work, visit her blog at: www.kerrypither.ca. ■



Dr. Gloria Rockwell MD, Msc, FRCSC

Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon University of Ottawa, and Medical Director of Shine

Chances are you'll be covertly counting on your fingers within minutes of meeting Dr. Gloria Rockwell. How can someone so young possibly have such a long and impressive list of academic credentials? She recites her accolades hurriedly: an undergraduate in Science (magna cum laude, Valedictorian) and medical degrees from Dalhousie University, plastic surgery and Masters Degrees from McMaster University, fellowships in breast reconstruction as well as hand, nerve and microsurgery from the University of Toronto and McMaster University, and additional plastic surgery training in Australia and Germany. She's a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada in Plastic Surgery and is certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgeons. All this and she still gets carded when buying a bottle of wine!

Rockwell practices at the Ottawa Hospital and is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Plastic Surgery at the University of Ottawa. She also has an important role as the Medical Director of the Shine Rejuvenation and Plastic Surgery Clinic, which just opened here in January of 2009. A comprehensive centre that incorporates the traditional Plastic Surgery procedures with cosmetic treatments, Rockwell says her goal at SHINE is to help people achieve their best possible outcomes, whether she is treating an impediment, or a routine cosmetic change.

While family and friends would describe Rockwell as a big-hearted, multi-faceted accomplished individual, this doctor is very vocal about some self-declared shortcomings. "For so many years I was in an academic cocoon, with few female role models and very little room or opportunities for social development. Just now, after spending over a decade engulfed in books and study, am I learning to spend time on my

personal developments and social life." While apologizing to fans of shows like *Grey's Anatomy* and *Nip/Tuck*, Dr. Rockwell reluctantly offers the truth; that med school, residencies, and fellowships can actually be very isolating and a lot of hard work. "There were entire years when I was unsure I was doing the *right* thing, in terms of balancing my career and personal happiness," she recalls. However, Rockwell is assured that all those years in competitive and stressful scholastic environments have already proven to be well worth the effort.

Highly impacted by a facial reconstruction surgery she witnessed in her early years at med school, Rockwell quickly abandoned her sport medicine aspirations and focused fully on plastic and reconstructive surgery. In 2004, after completing nearly 17 years of postgraduate schooling, she made the move to Ottawa, where she instantly felt welcomed. "I wanted to settle in an academic centre, so that I could continue my research and teach alongside my clinical practice", Rockwell explains. "Ottawa just seemed like a natural fit." While she admits that her busy schedule has kept her from experiencing all the city has to offer, Rockwell insists that her courageous and appreciative patients have given her great reason to believe this to be a truly exceptional community. "There are great supportive networks here in Ottawa for women dealing with breast cancer, so I'm lucky to see a lot of women come in with the support of friends and fellow survivors, optimistic about reconstructive surgery." She adds, "It's so great to be a part of the process."

Rockwell admits that she is so busy trying to keep up with the high volume of patients requiring surgery that there can sometimes be a disconnection between methodical and humane aspects of her work. However every day she is pleasantly reminded that a surgery she administered has changed someone's life exponentially. Whether giving patients the gift of renewed confidence, or the use of something as vital as their hands, this surgeon calls her job one of the most rewarding in the world. ■

At an age when most young Canadians are concerned with toting books and tall lattes to 8:30 lectures, Tanya Bracanovich had bigger fish to fry. At twenty three, she immigrated to Canada, leaving family, friends, and familiarity back home in Croatia (former Yugoslavia). Armed with her dental license and a bold and brassy appetite for business, she was quickly approved by the Canadian National Dentistry Board and put in her necessary time as an associate. Just four years after arriving in the city she calls, "the most hospitable in the world", Dr. Bracanovich founded her own practice. Today, Sparks Dental is one of the fastest growing and technologically advanced clinics in Ottawa.

Even before purchasing the space Dr. Bracanovich can recall having a very distinct vision of her practice, "I wanted to create a positive space, where everyone was comfortable and relaxed – a friendly and warm environment designed to set my clients at ease". She remembers peering through the windows of the property (which used to be an old sausage restaurant) and picturing the clinic perfectly. While she didn't have ideal financial or familial support in those early years, she maintains that having that initial vision, regardless of how abstract, was critical to her entrepreneurial success. "I would advise young entrepreneurs to take risks, maintain their vision, and to stay positive", says Bracanovich. "Having your own business is like a baby – you take care of it, and hold its hand until matured." And matured Sparks Dental has! Since the introduction of laser dentistry in 2002, the clinic has seen over 10,000 patients, and is currently in the process of expansion.

Bracanovich considers acquiring citizen status as one of her most significant personal achievements, and deems herself Canadian to the utmost degree. She is adamant this country offered her more than any other could, and is thankful her children, Alex (10) and Mia (8), were born here. Recognizing bilingualism as a vital component to her children's education, Bracanovich can think of no reason why her family would ever leave Ottawa. "Ottawa is a great city to raise a family. It has a fantastic sense of community, but is big enough to offer constant discovery and opportunity." She makes a concentrated effort to give back to the public by supporting local charities and to provide pro-bono dental work to those who need it most.

In the limited free time she has, Dr. Bracanovich likes to ski and hike, but finds it difficult to be away from the clinic for too long. "I no longer seem to view dentistry as my work – it feels more like a hobby. I love making sure that everyone is comfortable and cared for at the clinic." Although she affectionately refers to her staff as the 'dental dream team', Dr. Bracanovich credits the majority of her success to her parents, for raising her to be a strong and independent thinker. Ottawa owes them great kudos as well, for allowing such a promising, tenacious, young business mind to come to Canada and pursue her dream. ■



Dr. *Tanya*
Bracanovich

Laser Dentist and Business Founder;
Sparks Dental Clinic

Monique Couture

Intellectual Property Lawyer,
Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP



When asked how her children would describe her, Monique Couture is confident in her reply. “They would say that I love to laugh.” Not the kind of answer you would expect from one of the top trademark lawyers in the country. Couture comes across as genuinely warm, friendly and grounded and is refreshingly candid. This Ottawa native is an extremely successful intellectual property lawyer with one of Canada’s leading firms, Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP. Her practice spans the clearance of marks, to the prosecution of applications and the enforcement of rights. She lectures on trademark law in the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa and has spoken on Intellectual Property at the University’s Faculty of Engineering, and at various conferences in Russia, the U.S.A., and Canada. Defying great odds as a working mom, dare it be said that Monique Couture has managed to have her cake, and eat it too?

Couture grew up as the youngest of 6 children in Ottawa, where some of her siblings (and now multiple nieces and nephews) still reside. While a double degree in Slavic Studies and Economics isn’t something many students would consider — it proved to be a perfect fit for Couture, who obtained her undergraduate degree (and eventually her Law degree) from the University of Ottawa. She went on to receive a Masters in Russian Language and Literature from Norwich University, and was called to the Bar of Ontario in 1995. Given her academic background and fluency in Russian, Couture was a natural fit for the Gowlings’ Moscow office, where she spent four years and eventually became the Head of the firm’s Representative Office.

During her time in Moscow from 1996–2000, Couture participated in the Gowlings Alternative Dispute Resolution World Bank Project, served on the Board of the Canadian Business Association of Russia (now CERBA), and was listed in the *2000 Euromoney Guide to the World’s Leading Trade Mark Law Practitioners*. She also established Gowlings’ litigation and anti-counterfeiting practices, and oversaw a doubling in size of Gowlings’ Moscow office.

After four years in Russia, coming back to Canada proved to be a huge transition, but one that that Couture and her husband were happy to make. After years in a city of 13 million people, they missed the peace and tranquility that Ottawans often take for granted, and wanted to reunite with old friends and growing families. The couple and their children now live in the beautiful countryside in Chelsea, QC, a place that Couture bashfully admits is ‘poetically beautiful’. She has continued to develop her intellectual property practice at Gowlings, litigating before the Federal Court of Canada in both trial and appellate work. She’s a member of the Canadian Anti-Counterfeiting Network (CACN), which aims to dramatically reduce the presence of counterfeit and pirated products in Canada, and is a regular contributor to various legal journals and newsletters.

When asked if she feels she’s had to make significant personal sacrifices to reach such professional heights, Couture’s flat answer is no. While staying true to her personal aspirations, she admits having weathered some challenges. However, keeping personal and family goals a priority, all else has seemed to come naturally. She credits success to her optimism, the opportunities she’s enjoyed at Gowlings, resilience, sense of humour, and above all else — the love of her family. ■



The Hon. *Helena Guergis*
Minister of State (Status of Women)

While politics may run in the Guergis family blood, Helena admits that her loving and concerned father cautioned her to put an end to her political career — before it truly began. “When I first wanted to run for office my father pulled me aside and suggested that I should focus on settling down and planning a family” she recalls with a smile. “He implied that my place was at home and my cousin, Dave, would be better suited to run for public office.” Determined to prove him wrong, Guergis accepted a position as a political advisor to then Ontario Minister of Education and Finance, Janet Ecker. She now sits in the Harper Cabinet and is excited to call Ottawa her second home. On weekends, Guergis retreats to the small community of Angus, her hometown in the Simcoe-Grey riding, where she has lived for 37 years. Although she admits that at times she misses the pace of life back in Angus, her decision to embark on a political career was the right one and her father remains her biggest supporter. As for cousin Dave? He— along with many other of Guergis’s cousins and siblings— has found his place in provincial politics, as the mayor of Essa Township. Of her politically-inclined clan, Guergis says jokingly, “there just must be something in that Angus water!”

Elected in 2004, the soft-spoken yet surprisingly feisty Conservative quickly made a name for herself in Ottawa. She was named the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, and soon after was promoted to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade, as well as Secretary of State for Sport. Her most recent and significant professional victory came following the 2008 federal election, when Prime Minister Harper appointed her to be the Minister of State for the Status of Women. In this role, Guergis has been working directly with the Prime Minister and Status of Women Canada (a federal agency) to develop an action plan to promote equality for woman by allocating funding to appropriate organizations and towards specific goals to better the participation for women in economic, social and democratic life in

Canada. In particular, the minister speaks passionately of the government's efforts to end the unthinkable violence that many aboriginal women in Canada face. She promises that her Status of Women action plan (to be released in full later this year) will provide support to this specific population, and is grateful for the continuous support of Prime Minister Harper and the Cabinet.

Of her time in Parliament, Guergis views her proudest accomplishment as travelling to Afghanistan to meet female parliamentarians, and working to coordinate the first parliamentary delegation from Afghanistan to visit Canada. “The fact that they were an all female delegation who had seen firsthand the tremendous success that has been achieved in Afghanistan, due in large part to Canadian involvement, provided them with the opportunity to communicate directly with Canadians and give their thanks,” Guergis remarks, “I look forward to seeing them again.”

Between parliamentary sittings and frequent trips throughout her riding, Guergis’s schedule is certainly a busy one. Once an active volunteer at the Barrie Rape Crisis Centre and at several local food banks, the Minister now struggles to find any personal time at all. In fact, this fall, after three failed attempts at setting a wedding date, the Minister and her fiancé, former caucus colleague Rahim Jaffer, decided to put an end to their modest quest for pomp and circumstance. Donned in jeans and sweaters, the two eloped quietly on Oct 15th. Their wedding was presided over by former Member of Parliament and friend Ian McClelland, and took place in his backyard. When asked how married life is treating her, the surprisingly shy politician smiles demurely and says simply, “It’s great”. While she and Mr. Jaffer are excited to live in Ottawa, they admit it’s been a great challenge deciding which area to settle down in. “There are just so many great ones to choose from!” she exclaims.

So how does Canada’s top female parliamentary spend her limited amount of free time? “Staying still” she smiles. “No flying, no driving. Just being still and enjoying the moment”. ■