

Life story of Carol Green

Carol Green was born in 1955 and is now 49 years old, a resident of Toronto. What is most important to her right now, she says, is her family – her son, her husband, and her parents. Her siblings, extended family, and friends are also a priority in her life.

“I was 42 when I got married—the first marriage for both of us—so that is really unusual...In fact, we’re way off the charts for anything to do with so-called normal or average. We’ve done everything quite differently.” Carol worked until her son was born, at age 43, then went on maternity leave for a year, at which time she decided not to go back to work. She says, “We’d been given this chance to have a child—and we call him our miracle baby—I couldn’t see having someone else raise him. So I made the decision to at least stay out of the work force until he was five or six and then decide what I’m going to do after that.”

Meanwhile, Carol has started a small business of her own – a cottage industry making jams and pickles. She found she had time on her hands at odd hours – and has a huge vegetable garden, so five years ago she decided to start making jams and jellies and see if she could sell them to people, taking courses in how to use proper techniques and doing the work in her own kitchen. She has thought about making it into a full-fledged business, with separate facilities, but that is a big step so for now she will continue to sell her goods to people she knows and at country fairs. In its present state the business is low-risk, she says, “because if I don’t sell things in a certain year my relatives get jars of jam for Christmas.”

Writing is another of Carol’s interests – “social policy ...and spiritual kinds of writing” are how she describes what she does. She would like to be in a policy milieu where she can really have an impact, she says, or possibly do so through her involvement with the church.

When she was younger—a single career woman working in social services—her ideas about motherhood were very different than they are now. “I think I probably devalued the position myself,” she says. “I know I was fairly judgmental. And I think I really didn’t know what I was talking about. And I certainly didn’t know what I was talking about from the point of view of the workload of raising a child and managing a home...I thought everything was focused on your work-life, and yourself and your self-development. Of course, my own mother made these things possible for me, and I deeply appreciate her gifts and her own trials, and have told her so.”

“I have to say my own opinions were those of society and those of people who would say that when you work outside you’ve got a more important job. I think what I saw – my father was an anaesthetist, and I saw him going to the hospital to work and I thought, now that’s really interesting, and in fact I’d come with him occasionally to the hospital when he made his rounds at night to visit the patients who would have surgery the next day. And I thought that was really interesting to be able to do that. And so I think I identified with that more than with staying at home.”

Thinking back on her own career, she says, “I think I would have felt somewhat frustrated as a mother if I didn’t have a chance to have done this...I’ve seen it, I’ve done it, I feel that I’ve done it all and as a result I think I can be a very relaxed mother...I still think it’s a very devalued position in society...If you want pats on the back this is not the thing to be doing because you just don’t get recognition.”

In addition to being a “stay-at-home” wife and mother, running a cottage industry from home, Carol volunteers at the church she attends – mainly doing committee work, and at her son’s school in a variety of capacities, as well as ensuring her son’s recreational programming gets carried out as it should.

I asked Carol about her plans for retirement and she responded in terms of both her own plans and her husband’s retirement from work, due to happen sometime in the future. They live in Toronto, and she says he “is very connected to being in this place,” but while she is happy to live here for the time being, she is not sure that she wants to retire in this area where the pace of life is so fast. Born and raised in the Ottawa area, Carol goes back to visit quite often, giving her son the chance to get to know this side of his family better, and says she wouldn’t mind returning there to live eventually. As for her future in the work-force, when she’s past age 55, she says, “I would see myself not working full-time. So I guess, in a sense, semi-retired is how I would see myself.”

For a long time, when she first moved to Toronto from London, Ontario, she could not find work. Because she was not in the labour force she would say to her former colleagues, “Well I consider myself semi-retired.” She continues, “It was partly a joke and partly some kind of defence mechanism but I thought of myself as sort of semi-retired at that point. And I had a funny thought the other day. I’ll be fifty in a year... I may never be full-time in the labour force again. And that thought crossed my mind because I know I’ve been talking and thinking about part-time – like three days a week or something, and I thought, wow, so that means when I took my maternity leave that meant that that’s the very end of my whole career, as it was. And it just really dawned on me. Maybe I never will hold a full-time job again.”

Carol refers to herself as a late bloomer, in education as well as in terms of marriage and starting a family. She did her first degree after graduating from high school, achieving an honours BA in Geography at the University of Western Ontario, but did not return to do her Masters (in Sociology) until she was 32. During the twenty years she lived in London she worked in the community at various social and health-care non-profit organizations and at municipal and provincial levels of government, taking time out to start the MA degree, then taking on a full-time job while completing it. The thesis for her MA was connected to the job she was doing with the children’s council, and at the end of it all she was able to see a street youth drop-in centre her agency and others had been working towards finally open its doors. She says, “It was really rewarding to me to actually see something come into place that I believed in, and you could actually see it doing some good...From a very early age I’ve wanted to have some influence on social policy, whether local or national or global, or whatever, but always to do with helping people in some tangible way.”

The policy of mandatory retirement may not ever directly affect Carol’s life but she has her own views on the subject. She says, “I don’t think people should have to retire. If they’re not capable of doing the job that’s a different thing. That’s sad if they don’t realize that but in those cases obviously a person needs to retire...And I think we really shouldn’t make people retire. Most people want to retire. It’s a delicate balance, because you have to let those people retire, when they’re able to...There needs to be something whereby you can let those people go, and be pensioned off, and they can *not* work, but the ones who want to work can keep going.”

Life story of Carol Green written by Sue McPherson following interview in 2004.

Diversity in Retirement website: <http://DiversityinRetirement.homestead.com> 2004-05.
The Dilemma of Mandatory Retirement. Sue McPherson writer, website design