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Resident Feature

What's Not to Love

Meet Sue Lawson

By Adwynna MacKenzie | Photos by Inger MacKenzie

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Sue Lawson is a lawyer. You may go on to do other things in life, but you are always a lawyer. Sue is also a very good one; having once been the Assistant Crown Attorney for Toronto, Halton, Peel and the Ministry of the Attorney General as Counsel for the Victim/Witness Assistance Program and a Law Instructor at Sheridan College. Sue also married a lawyer, Jim, whom she met at law school at the University of Western Ontario and married in 1986. They just celebrated their 30th anniversary with a trip to the Canadian Rockies.

The attributes that made Sue a great lawyer have led her to a place that excites her so much she can't stop listing all the reasons why she loves what she's doing! Words like passion, obsession, impact, helping, fun, growth, humbled, and honored all tumble out (but very succinctly) as she describes her latest career.

She could have rested on her distinguished laurels and done more pro bono work and perhaps that was once her intention. She said she "didn't see this coming" yet it quickly turned into a home run! Perfectly ok to use a baseball analogy here. Sue loves the Toronto Blue Jays and she has spent a *lot* of time at baseball games.

Jim and Sue have three children, all young adults now. Their children are athletes and their oldest son Tim, a high-level baseball player, was applying to colleges in the US during high school. Lawyers are taught to research, so Sue did as all good lawyers (and mothers) do and dove in deep to understand the complexities of getting accepted into American colleges. This led her to create a business she is both excellent at, and obsessed with!

"People started coming to me for advice on schools and I thought, 'I might as well turn this into a business,' explained Sue. " So I took a course at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) which was

a post graduate Certificate in College Admissions Advising. It took two and half years and during that time I thought I'd be working with kids who wanted to go to college in the US, but it's totally changed. Most of the kids I work with are going to school in Canada and these days I do a lot more career assessments and aptitude testing to help kids end up in the right programs for them."

It's kind of funny that Sue's search for schools for her kids became her business and then all three kids ended up going to universities here in Canada! The three Lawson children were all ski racers and the family still enjoys skiing at Devil's Glen. The boys, Tim and Jonnie, played baseball with Little League and then with the Royals, which is a program that travels extensively for high level competition. Tim went on to play baseball for Brock University and now lives in Calgary while Jonnie, who is the youngest, currently attends McGill University and is on the football team. Brodie is their daughter and the oldest and she now has a career in sports media in Toronto. Not all that surprising, considering she danced at Grace Academy, was a FIS (International Federation of Skiers) level skier and rowed while attending the University of Western Ontario.

The kids all live elsewhere now, but love Oakville and look forward to visits home to the house they've lived in since they were born. "Even though we are now empty nesters," said Sue, "we just can't imagine moving from this house or this neighbourhood." The Lawson's have lived in the same home for 28 years and the houses on their street don't turn over very often making for a real sense of community and continuity. They all know each other's children and relatives and people really look out for and care about each other. Despite being empty nesters the Lawson's do have a 14 year old Redbone Coonhound called Chessie to keep them company!

"What's not to love?" said Sue about her life as a busy Educational Consultant. "I love people and I really enjoy working with teenagers. They are at that stage in life where there's so much promise and they are starting to explore themselves and who they might be outside of their family." She sees every child she works with as entry into a whole new world of possibilities. "I love getting to meet families in Oakville that I wouldn't otherwise meet," she said.

"This business keeps me on top of trends in society, which means I see where job opportunities are and where the world is going. It's so fascinating on so many fronts." She loves when she gets to start with her clients early, around Grade 10. "Then I get the privilege of watching them mature, and they start to trust their instincts and develop their own decision making skills," she explains.

Sue is a huge source of knowledge for students and parents. She knows that people tend to look at the university scene the way they experienced it when they went to one and yet schools have totally changed. There are so many different programs that simply didn't exist 25 or 30 years ago! Oakville tends to be filled with business and engineering graduates, so it's important to explain to both parents and students that the 'softer skill' programs are actually super valuable. "Sometimes parents may not see the benefit of liberal arts or fine art programs yet things like integrative thinking, communication and the ability to see different viewpoints are all hugely valuable skills in today's marketplace," said Sue. She is very aware that people who can communicate and have the ability to understand people from different cultures and backgrounds are crucial assets for companies. "I help parents understand there is tremendous value to those educations," explained Sue, "there is no one path for everyone and sometimes community college is the best way to go in order to have a truly satisfying life experience."

As she talks, Sue gets to the heart of why she does what she does. She really enjoys teenagers. She loves to know what makes them tick, what they want and the things they care about. She also knows they just don't know what their options are and this is the information she thrives on! "There is so much out there that allows kids to maximize

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fun. She loves golf, skiing, reading and the joy of living in south Oakville. A lifetime of sports with their children also means a true love for the Toronto Blue Jays and a soft spot for the Hamilton Tiger Cats!

She's been a board member of Oakville Galleries, Kinark Child and Family Services and volunteers with a national scholarship program assessing candidates and advising scholarship winners. She also does pro bono work on a case by case basis and recently helped a Syrian refugee apply to university. She will start a new affiliation with an organization called Trust15 that works with high performing, at risk students.

It's a question we may have heard, but not many of us take the time to answer. "What's the thing you can't not do?" For Sue Lawson, "Well first, I can't not visit campuses and the other happens when I meet a teenager. I have to ask them 'What are you doing? What do you love?' Plus, I have a bizarre addiction to visiting campuses. I can't help myself! We'd be travelling and the family would go 'distract her, distract her there's a campus over there!' I did it even before I had this job, it's simply who I am. It just took me a long time to put all the pieces together. It's my hope that my work helps kids get to do what they love, and that my presence made it a whole lot faster and easier for them!"

their skills, passions, and interests. It's my job to match all of that up so a kid ends up in the best place," she explains. "Kids are stressed and anxious, so the more I work with them the more stories I have to share with the next group so they don't feel alone. Even their friends who think they know what they want are anxious too!"

Sue goes way beyond the obligations of her consulting business. Last year she ran an information session for first year students so they would know what was coming and the resources available to them on campuses. "I'd get clients after first year that had had a rough first year. Sometimes it's the wrong program, sometimes it's too much freedom." Her daughter wisely and vocally told her no one would listen to her as yet another "blah, blah, blah parent" so she got a panel of three students to deal with the normal stuff like "do I need to go to classes?" and "I'm homesick." It was a big success so she will do that again and also pairs kids who are going to school with the kids who are coming out of high school.

Sue tends to be pretty passionate about the rest of her life as well. Sue does put things in her schedule to ensure she stays fit and gets a little time off for

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