

# EMPOWER MINDS... INSPIRE SPIRITS... HEAL HEARTS

By Lorraine Leslie

When I first met Grace Cirocco at a networking event in the small hamlet in Hornings Mills, Ontario I had no idea that this vibrant, passionate, high-energy woman of vision was about to have a profound impact on my life...

Arrangements had been made in advance for me to meet and interview Grace prior to her dynamic presentation. Finding a private and quiet place to do the interview drew us to the basement of the recreation hall. We un-stuck some stackable chairs, found an old chipped wooden table and proceeded to get to know each other. Tape recorder in her hand, pen and paper in mine, Grace had me captivated with every word she spoke.

Grace holds a B.A. (Honours) degree in Philosophy from Queens University and has completed graduate studies in philosophy and ethics at the University of Western Ontario. She spent five years with Fred Pryor Seminars, speaking to thousands of people in Canada, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. Grace

has studied various psychological modalities including Psychoneuroimmunology, and cognitive psychology. She is a graduate of the "Certified Coach Training Intensive" and "Neuro-Linguistic-Programming, both of which have honed her ability to do one-on-one counselling and therapeutic healing.

We talked about her birthplace in Italy, about her growing up on a farm in Niagara-on-the-Lake and about her travels as a young woman. But most of all, we spoke about how she eventually came to be an author, motivational speaker and spiritual teacher.



*This was her awakening and her challenge. Grace wrote those words in big letters on her office wall. The words "Take the Step, the Bridge Will be There" became her compass whenever she wanted to give up on her dream.*

producing Olympic stories. For her efforts she received an Award of Distinction in Broadcasting for her coverage of the games. After the Games, Grace took a year off and travelled around the world with her husband stopping in California and doing a short stint for an American private radio station. She came back to Canada, worked at CTV's Canada AM, and eventually landed a job with the federal government. The government job came in handy because she came home from her trip expecting her first child. "A 24-hour newsroom is no place for a pregnant woman".

So how did she make the leap from government to speaking and

"I'm an idea person and I love people stories, so I wanted to work for the CBC. I didn't know how this was going to happen with no journalism degree and no contacts, but one day, I put on my best suit, held my head up high, and walked past security, past the secretary and right into the office of the executive producer of CBC television's "The National". He was amazed that I got past security, but he did give me advice. He said T.V. was too difficult for beginners, but to visit his friends at CBC Radio and start

there. So I met with Maurice Jones at CBC National Radio news. He was a visionary and he gave me my first break. We had a three-hour conversation about everything under the sun. I just loved him and I think he loved me, but in the end he said: "There are no jobs here, only cutbacks. Sorry." Two days later, however, he called and offered me a job. Apparently someone was leaving, moving on, and an entry-level position had become available. He said he knew it was a risk but he had a really good feeling about me. Apparently there was a movement within CBC Radio to not only hire broadcast journalists, but historians, scientists, lawyers, business people and luckily for me, philosophers. I was to be their special 'pilot project'. If I could learn "broadcasting" on the job, then they would open it up for others. That was 1985. I stayed with the CBC for five years."

In 1987 she moved to Calgary and got a job producing the CBC Radio morning show, The Calgary Eye-Opener. The following year, the Olympics arrived, and for three weeks straight, Grace worked long hours

writing? While at the government, she attended a one-day seminar. "I got the call of the soul loud and clear", she says. "It was like a lightning bolt! This was what I wanted to do...not teach in a university, not on radio, but LIVE in person, to adults. I didn't know that this kind of work even existed! It was a complete eye-opener for me!" She was so excited that when she got home that night, she announced to her husband "I know what I want to be when I grow up!!" Three days later, her husband spotted a tiny advertisement in the newspaper that read, "International Seminar Company coming to Toronto looking for Canadian speakers to expand into Canada. There was no phone number, just a hotel address. Grace showed up with 500 other people - that was 1992.

"Everyone had been restructured out of a job - they had all been given the golden handshake. I looked around the room at all these professionals and I got the doubt demons, "Who do you think you are?" they said. "You have no experience speaking in front of people. Just leave right now and avoid embarrassment." But I didn't. I even came back the next day to do an audition".

Three months later, Grace got a telephone call that would change the direction of her life. She was being invited with 5 others who were short-listed to do Train the Trainer. Grace was a natural and so she was one of two people hired. That's when her speaking career began. "I was grateful to be hired by Fred Pryor Seminars because I received valuable training as a professional speaker. Even though public speaking came easily to me, I still needed to hone my skills." Three continents and tens of thousands of people later, Grace left Fred Pryor Seminars and launched CIROCCO & ASSOCIATES Training & Consulting. "I had two small children and I wanted to stay close to home. Besides, there were plenty of people that could use my training services in Toronto, I thought." But it was difficult to drum up business. After two years, mounting debts, and a husband who freelanced, she decided it was time to get a "real" job.

And that's when she had the dream; the dream incidentally that appears in the Introduction of her book, *Take the Step, the Bridge Will be There*. She writes:

"I was supposed to scale a vertical wall. It was smooth, shiny and hard. It was made of marble and went straight up. Climb this with my bare hands? Impossible, I thought, but I knew that at least one other person had done it, a Chinese acrobat. She was tiny and athletic. I had to get up the wall because I had to solve a computer problem of national importance on the other side. I was the only one who had the answer to the problem, yet I couldn't get over that darn wall. I tried and tried. Each time I slid right down to the bottom. There was nothing to hold on to. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath and said to myself, "I can do this." I began to repeat, "I can do it, I can do it, I can do it," over and over again to myself until it became a mantra. All the while, I was focusing on the marble wall. And then eight words appeared out of nowhere. *Take The Step ... The Bridge Will Be There*. The words were there at the top of the wall, beckoning me to go up.

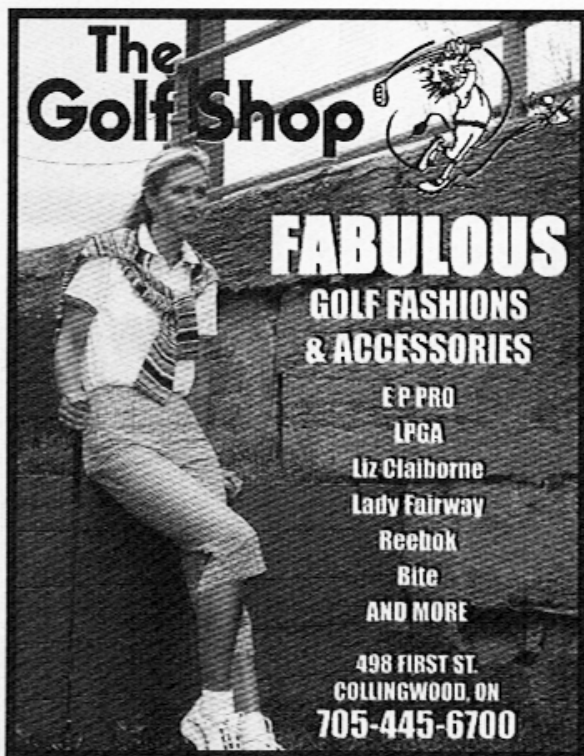
"Take the step...Okay. The bridge will be there? What bridge? There was no bridge. Just a wall. I needed to go over that wall. Okay, relax. Take a deep breath. Focus. Visualize. Grace you can do it. Grace you can do it. Just do it!"

*"My work is a sacred calling. I feel privileged in this lifetime because I get to play my song with all 88 keys of the piano. My mission and my greatest passion is to breathe inspiration into others so they, too, will hear their song played with all 88 keys."*

I opened my eyes - miraculously I had climbed the wall. I was at the top. All I could think was: gee, was that ever easy! Wow, I did it! And then the doubt came. Yes, but could I do that again? I needed to know, so I slid back down the wall. This was a risk! I closed my eyes and saw the same words. Okay, I get it. Do it with faith! Then I was climbing again, except this time it was even easier. I began thinking, maybe I should tell others about this. Then I woke up."

This was her awakening and her challenge. Grace wrote those words in big letters on her office wall. The words "Take the Step, the Bridge Will be There" became her compass whenever she wanted to give up on her dream.

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She eventually created "Take the Step, the Bridge Will be There" workshops and they were life changing for people. "I couldn't believe people's reaction to those words...how they spoke to many people." She decided it was time to write a book but didn't make it a priority right away. "I think I was too afraid that I wouldn't have anything original to say, so I procrastinated. But my saving 'Grace' was that I kept telling everyone at my workshops that I was writing a book." The truth is she had not even put one word on paper, although she had been keeping a journal off and on for years. More years went by and Grace's name was out there now. She was being hired to speak at conferences, to governments and to the corporate world, but still no book.

Then one day she came home to find an interesting voice mail message from an employee who worked at Chapters bookstore. "Yes, we've had several people asking to buy your book "Take the Step ... The Bridge Will Be There", but we can't find it. Can you please call us with the ISBN number so we can order it for these customers." She says...this was the final inspiration, the Divine message to get going. She made one phone call to HarperCollins, had a contract within 3 months, and 9 months later gave birth to her first book. Take the Step, the Bridge will be There (October 2001) has been a national success, achieving "bestseller status" after a year. It has just come out in soft cover (April 2003) and soon will be published in the U.S., Australia and translated into French.

"Not only did I get an opportunity to use my educational and career expertise in writing my book but I transformed myself in doing so. Writing it was a holy experience. I was in direct communication with my angel guides, my creative Muses and God. I overcame my fear and took the step, so I know others can too." Grace teaches us how to be authentic, how to forgive the past, build self-esteem and dance with Spirit. She says it's important to make peace with God and to use our hearts to do "our greatest work," which is to love.

"My work is a sacred calling. I feel privileged in this lifetime because I get to play my song with all 88 keys of the piano. My mission and my greatest passion is to breathe inspiration into others so they, too, will hear their song played with all 88 keys."

Grace encourages people to live their lives authentically, passionately and with courage. She empowers minds, inspires spirits and heals hearts. She teaches us to reach for the radiance and light within all of us, recognize it, celebrate it, and create a better world.

At the end of Grace's presentation there was a rush of people wanting to speak with her ... it was one of the most motivating, inspiring and entertaining hours I had enjoyed in quite some time. I waited for the crowd to disperse. We looked at each other and I knew I had found a kindred spirit. After reading Grace's book and sharing with her my awakening (to be shared at a later date) that happened five years ago, I can now take another step because I know the bridge will again be there.