

Bonnie Ross-Parker's Story

Written by Angela Newman

Oh, the dream of so many young girls; to be able to travel the world and visit the many exotic locations and famous cities like Paris and Rome. How fun and romantic! But being able to do that requires a lot of money so the only way Bonnie thought to reach that goal was to get hired on as a flight attendant. Unfortunately, that dream was not possible because back then airlines put restrictions on who would get hired and who wouldn't. In fact, in those days they weren't even called attendants, they were 'airline stewardesses'.

Bonnie said her, *"Desire got squelched because of three factors: 1. There was a maximum height requirement and I surpassed that! 2. You couldn't wear glasses. 3. You couldn't be married!!! This was in the late fifties - imagine any of these restrictions today. So, my next choice was to become a teacher. I taught middle school math and language arts for 12 years and loved it and also achieved a Master's degree in Education as well."*

Due to health issues Bonnie was forced to take a year off from teaching during which time she decided to pursue a different avenue. Instead of returning to teaching she *"decided on a change and invested time and money into building multiple franchises with Mail Boxes Etc."* Over the next 12 years she managed 28 franchises, six of which she owned. As one can imagine this was quite a change from teaching, but obviously Bonnie was very skilled and successful with this new direction in her life. She found it to be *"quite a change and challenge - both providing to be worthwhile and rewarding personally and professionally."*

Entrepreneurship runs in Bonnie's family so she wasn't a complete stranger to it. Her dad has owned his own business since she was a young girl and Bonnie was fortunate to witness first-hand the dedication and hard work required to run your own business. Anyone who runs their own business knows it is truly a 24/7 commitment especially in the initial phases. Bonnie said it was her dad that *"set the stage for my spirit toward personal success."*

As it should be for any of us, she doesn't define personal success around career and financial status alone. Bonnie walked 60 miles for the Avon Breast Cancer organization in honor of two

of her closest and dearest friends that were going through treatment. She also ran a marathon to raise awareness around depression and suicide in memory of a high school friend who took her own life as a senior in high school. In addition to these personal moments that hit close to home, she was awarded the Athena Award in 2002 and honored by the Women's Leadership Exchange as an influential woman of Georgia.

In 1995, Bonnie moved from DC to Atlanta and within a year she was already helping women by being a mentor to them for their career goals. She created a drop-in mentoring program, free to all women who wanted to attend. Kudos Bonnie! What a great concept. Even though she stopped the program after 3 years, it is not surprising that Bonnie would offer such a great service to women because she is a strong believer in networking and connecting people to help one another and currently has a wonderful program called 'The Joy of Connecting'. She says, *"This program is committed to the success of us as a collaborative group of women."*

Her belief that networking is the key to business success is evidenced by her own company, her focus on networking and the books she has authored. *"Business is all about relationships. There are many networking sites and organizations for both women and men to get involved with; however, I prefer women's groups vs mixed gender because women network differently than men."*

Bonnie is a self declared solo entrepreneur who completely believes in herself and trusts the decisions she makes knowing that some of the decisions both operational and financial can be daunting at times. *"I've learned over the years to stick with passion, to stay focused and to believe in the gifts I offer, the talents I've developed and the progress I've made."* She also keeps her goals in front of her to review everyday to keep her focused on her plan and surrounds herself with loyal, supportive and positive colleagues who help her out when needed.

When asked what advice Bonnie would give to women just starting their career ladder, she said, *"Take time to improve personally and professionally daily. Books and seminars are key components to success and learn from others' experiences. There are so many resources available today that there is absolutely no excuse for not sharpening your skills, learning new tasks and preparing yourself for future endeavors. Frankly, the marketplace is crowded*

and competitive. You have to distinguish yourself from others to get ahead. It's all about personal determination and commitment."

Bonnie is clearly determined and committed to her goal of building a large organization for women so they can be supported and valued in their own endeavors. She hopes to leave a legacy that she enriched lives through her own example and hard work and she is certainly on her way to doing that!

To be a part of that organization, you can sign up on her website to become A Joy of Connecting® Licensee!



Bonnie Ross-Parker is the CEO/Founder of The JOY of Connecting (www.TheJOYofConnecting.com)

You can also visit her at www.BonnieRossParker.com.

