WOMEN | COMMUNICATION | CREATING | PERSONAL GROWTH | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Joy Of Connecting

The forward written in Lisa Marie's book, Connection: The New Currency

by **Bonnie Ross-Parker**

1712 words | 6 pages

"Whatever is in you can be put to better use if you learn to connect with people."

John C. Maxwell (1947 -)
Bestselling Author/Speaker

When Lisa Marie asked me to write the forward to her book, I enthusiastically said "Yes!" to the task, knowing her book was a collection of connection stories. I feel as if someone handed me a silver platter. Not only do I *live* the story, but connecting *is* my way of life.

As I read the personal and intimate stories in *Connection: The New Currency*, I felt immediately drawn to each of the contributing writers because of their commonality of thought, the similarity of their experiences and their numerous examples of how connection has played a significant role in each of their lives. Over and over again, their connections led them to a new path or journey. Connection offered them support at a time of need, and it drew them to a bigger picture of life and living beyond their immediate surroundings.

More than a decade ago, I stepped up to prepare for *The Avon 3-Day Walk* – a 60-mile commitment to raise both money and awareness around a cure for breast cancer. I walked for two women: one who is a personal friend and for another woman whom I did not know, other than being touched by her story of courage and conviction. In both cases, I felt a compelling connection to these brave individuals and an unwavering belief that even my small effort, combined with thousands of others, could truly make a difference in the long term.

Training for a 60-mile journey at the age of 56 was not easy. Some days I walked 7 to 10 miles (almost a full time job) to prepare both my mind and

body for the challenge. Weekdays, I walked alone. Weekends, I *connected* with others in my geographic area. Initially, I did not pay much attention to the women who shared those weekend walks. At the time, I thought that the only thing we shared was the common thread of believing in a cause and the need for proper preparation. As time went on, however, the connections with my walking sisters became a great source of strength and encouragement for me and kept me going when otherwise I may have quit.

Each of us had one singular goal – to cross the finish line. We were determined that no one would be left behind. We faced 90-degree days as well as rainy days. We endured blisters and backaches. On a couple of days, we almost gave up. Fortunately, we also had great days to celebrate! In the end, everyone completed the task. We became an unstoppable force. We had connected on that painful and jubilant journey. We had become one family.

As I reflect back on that event eleven years ago, many aspects to the journey extended far beyond the preparation and the finish line. What happened between the "decision" to do the walk and actually completing it has had the greatest impact on my life, and I suspect on the lives of all the walkers, staff, volunteers, family members, contributors, etc. We are all *connected* on so many levels.

> **The first level of connection is with our self. We visualize the goal in front of us. We put one foot in front of the other one moment, one minute and one hour at a time.**

We were frequently alone with our thoughts; we were focused on the women we were honoring; and in my case, inspired while listening to motivational music (I Can Fly for example!). At that moment, we realized that whatever discomfort we were enduring was insignificant compared to the suffering that women with breast cancer and their loved ones endure. Being connected with one's self for the time being removes you from all other aspects of your life – you and you alone to complete the task. No one else can walk the journey for you.

Next is the *connection with community* - my walking sisters, their stories, their shared reasons for going the distance and their unwavering faith that, like me, made a difference. We walked alongside happy, healthy women and a few good and supportive men. We walked beside survivors who, dressed with pink hats, were the ever present reminder of why we were doing what we had chosen to do. They were laughing; they were singing. They were praising their spiritual source to be healthy enough to make the long trek. They endured and appreciated being alive; they were grateful to us for supporting them. They are the community, and we were all connected. We were connected to those who lost the fight, to those who continue to seek a cure and to the survivors who have endured and are thriving. No words exist to express the emotional depth of this binding experience, which I would have missed had I not chosen to participate.

Three days and 60 miles later, the walk ended at Piedmont Park in Atlanta to the thunderous applause of well wishers. We literally entered this vast area into a sea of pink – shirts, balloons, hats, signs. I can, even after all this time, vividly recall the spectacle, which was emotionally overwhelming. My husband was waiting to greet me and had prepared a sign he handed to me as I entered the gated area of the park. It read: What I Did for Love. This was an incredible personal moment in time.

We also have *connection with the world*. We are reminded of those who suffer and all who work toward making tomorrow better than today. We walked and felt uplifted by even the thought that our energy had rippled out beyond us, bringing healing vibrations to others. We knew that life would never be the same as it once was. We simply felt empowered as we recognize this truth: We are all here to connect and to care.

> ***"Consider how different your life could be if you were willing to take the actions necessary to change its direction."***

All of us are *connected for all eternity*. No connection is too small or insignificant. A connection can be a warm hug, a gentle word, appreciation expressed, an introduction or a kind and selfless deed. Connection can be work related, personal or casual. A connection can save a life, encourage a lost soul or create an unexpected outcome.

A connection – one simple connection - has the power to turn someone toward an entirely new direction.

Just think of the impact a seemingly insignificant connection has had on you which, at the time it occurred, did not seem like anything special. Think of a time when you made an introduction – a connection for someone else that had a powerful impact on that person's life.

Life is a journey. The word journey has the word "*our"* in it. None of us chooses to journey alone. We are all woven in the tapestry called life. The journey is about the people we meet, the experiences we share and the quality of our relationships. We learn from one another; we count on each other. We want to connect; we want to feel appreciated. We want to know that our life matters, and we all want to support and be supported. That's what *Connection: The New Currency* is all about.

Each of the compelling stories in this book is a reminder that connection is integral to our well-being. Connecting enriches our soul and those of others. May these stories inspire you to inspire others. You may never be the same again because you know people are looking and needing you to connect with them right now. Don't wait. Initiate. Give the gift of yourself, often, unselfishly and completely.

You can change the world and experience your own 60-mile walk. One step at a time – one connection at a time – life is and always will be about *connection*. You never know where a connection will lead.

Bonnie Ross-Parker
CEO/Founder of The Joy of Connecting
C: 770-333-7923 (Atlanta)
H: 770-333-9028
bootgirl@TheJOYofConnecting.com

Bonnie Ross-Parker, is a multi-dimensional businesswomen/entrepreneur with a background in education, franchise development, publishing, mentorship, network marketing, and community development. She combines vision with a unique set of skills. Formerly the Associate Publisher of *The Gazette Newspaper/Atlanta*, Ms. Ross-Parker now focuses her energies as the Chairwoman of the Cooperative Business Community for TNNWC Group LLC. She is the champion and chief advocate for the establishment of the interconnection of business networks around the world for the purpose of building the Global Interconnected Cooperative Business Community (GICBC).

In 2002, Ms. Ross-Parker created and incorporated The Joy of Connecting® gatherings for women. Nationwide, The Joy of Connecting® is an absolutely unique interpersonal customer acquisition/marketing program serving entrepreneurial, business women and professionals who are serious about growing their businesses. In September of 2009, The Latina Joy of Connecting® was created to bring a strong bond of sisterhood to women multi-ethnically and internationally.

Ms. Ross-Parker is a graduate of George Washington University, and earned a Certification in Network Marketing at the University of Chicago. Several of her articles on owning one's own business and entrepreneurship have appeared in publications including: *Wealth Building, Home Business Magazine, Business to Business and Entrepreneur's Business Start-Ups.*

In 2002, Ms. Ross-Parker received The Athena Award ~ an honor designed to acknowledge women of leadership in cities throughout the

United States. In September, 2005 she was honored by the Women's Leadership Exchange, a New York based organization, as an Influential Woman of Georgia and currently serves on their Atlanta Advisory Board. She is a featured speaker with the Direct Selling Women's Alliance. In May of that same year, Bonnie was honored by The International Toastmaster's Organization of Georgia with their annual Communication & Leadership Award. Most recently, Bonnie Ross-Parker was one of 8 women selected from hundreds of submissions to be recognized as part of the traveling *Princess Di Exhibit's Women's Wall of Achievement:* Celebrating Atlanta Women, 2010.