An exclusive magazine for the residents of Kitsilano

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CONNIE PRETULA

PUT YOURSELF FIRST

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RESIDENT FEATURE

Connie Pretula

PUT YOURSELF FIRST

By Richard Forzley
Photos Courtesy of Connie Pretula

"After 63 years of life, marriage, divorce, losing my dad at 27 and ensuring my mom had a good life until her death 30 years later, two careers and into my third, and so many other life events in between, it's hard to know where to begin."

Connie Pretula's succinct summary of her own life so far fails to explain this extraordinary woman who changed her perspective on life after her mother passed away. "She chose an assisted death because she wanted to die with dignity and grace. She will always be my hero for being so strong and leaving this world on her terms."

Connie's story is a reflection of the independence and courage she learned from her family and the willingness to make major life changes and live with the consequences in pursuit of health, well-being and personal satisfaction.

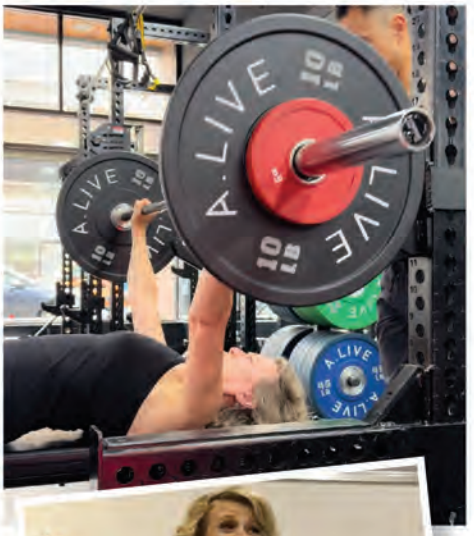
"It was inevitable that I would be some type of service provider since I was born into it," she says. "My father was a barber who took over my mother's grandfather's barber shop in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. My dad was an entrepreneur, a jack-of-all-trades and master of most. When he had an opportunity to purchase a barber and beauty shop in Fort Frances, he asked my mom to get her hairdressing license so she could manage the beauty shop.

"My mom was pregnant at the time and she told me that she worked the day I was born and went to the hospital after she finished with her last client. We lived above the shop and as I got older, I helped with various tasks, putting money in someone's meter or going to the local store to pick up cigarettes while they got their hair done. I'd make coffee, wash, dry and fold towels, fill shampoo and conditioner bottles and occasionally looked after the cash.

"When I was five, we moved to Yorkton and moved again a few years later to McCreary, a small farming community in Manitoba. When I look back on that time, I remember saying to my parents there was no way I wanted to run my own business after seeing how hard they worked. The big city was calling me, that was the life I wanted to live.

"Two weeks after graduating from high school, I moved to Winnipeg and started working for the Royal Bank as a file clerk. Over the 21 years I spent at RBC, I worked my way up to personal financial advisor, acquired my mutual funds license, passed the Canadian Securities course and completed six of the seven courses for a Certified Financial Planning designation.

"But something inside of me wanted more, I wanted to expand my skills and knowledge so in 2001, I entered the wild world of financial services technology with Emerging Information Systems, a start-up that had doubled in size the year prior, a change that eventually led me to Vancouver.



"In 2010, I accepted a position with Temenos, a global technology company, and thought I had landed my dream job assisting the sales team in demoing their comprehensive banking platform while being able to travel domestically and internationally.

"In Vancouver, I realized there were a lot of people who were focused on their health. This was something I had been doing for a number of years after gaining 30 pounds and, because of my family's health history, made my own health a priority.

"So how did I end up becoming a Certified Nutritional Practitioner? It started when I decided to have boudoir photos taken for my 50th birthday as inspired by Samatha Jones on Sex In The City. I also wanted to compete in a bodybuilding competition after one of my fellow employees made an amazing transformation to her body.

"I didn't enter a gym until I was 45, being terrified I would embarrass myself. An associate I worked with offered to show me how to lift weights. After my first session, I was hooked and hired a personal trainer to make sure I was doing things the right way.

"The bodybuilding competition and the intimate photos would capture the results of all my hard work. Something I recall Samatha saying about being old and saggy and being able to look at the photos years later and say — wow I was hot.

"I started preparing for the competition in 2012, shortly before my 51st birthday. After training five days a week and eating around 2700 calories a day, I was ready to compete. That's when the preparation gets tough, working out six days a week and reducing my calorie intake, typically referred to as the cutting process.

"I refused to take the typical supplements that many competitors take because they're filled with ingredients I didn't want in my body. I had to figure out how to do this naturally.

"I started researching and decided that I would leave the corporate world and go back to school to study nutrition. First the competition. In 2013, I stepped on stage and was proud to show off my hard work, winning 3rd place for women over 35.

"Physically, I was in the best shape of my life and still have those boudoir photos on my wall to prove it. But internally, my body was sick. I lacked energy, my digestive system was messed up and I was in pain 24/7. I was miserable and I resigned and never looked back, just a few weeks before my 53rd birthday.

"I had no idea how I was going to make it work but knew I would figure it out."

In 2016, Connie graduated with First Class Honours from The Institute of Holistic Nutrition and was chosen as Valedictorian. After 34 years, she decided to work for herself.

"Being a solopreneur (conniepretula.com) is not for the faint of heart and life has thrown many curve balls at me since

I left the corporate world. But even with all the challenges, I can't imagine doing anything else.

"While I was in school, I applied what I was learning to myself to see if I could heal my body. I had major menopause symptoms and it took about 18 months before I started to feel better, to be pain free every day. That's when I decided to work with women who were struggling with symptoms from menopause or other health challenges.

Connie lives in the Arbutus Walk area and loves the proximity to her gym, The Stretch Space on York and Halsa Spa for a monthly visit to enjoy their infrared saunas. Greens Market and Choices are nearby and the Kits Farmers Market is a few blocks down the street.

"I love the big old trees that line the streets and the endless number of great coffee shops to meet up with friends. And there's always the Kits Showboat in the summer and the buskers at the beach.

"Even though my balcony is small, I love to garden and appreciate having a few planters of flowers and my beautiful Star Jasmine shrub. Vancouver has endless places to walk or hike and enjoy all the natural beauty. I feel blessed to live so close to the shoreline, one of the best stress relievers ever. Even after 14 years living here, the views still take my breath away."

Connie's 33 year old stepson lives in Ottawa, making his own way in life as a computer system technician. "I met him when he was just five years old and although his dad and I separated almost 20 years ago, I feel privileged that I still have him in my life.

"I have benefited from 10 years of supporting my body the best way I can. As the years go by, I feel better and better, the cumulative result of my lifestyle. At 63, I feel amazing, in fact, I feel younger now than I did in my 40s and 50s."

Do you know a neighbour who has a story to share? Nominate your neighbour to be featured in one of our upcoming issues!
Contact us at rforzley@bestversionmedia.com