

Joan Lowery *By Diana Colson* **A Passion for Communication**

A thread flows between Joan Lowery's career and her lifetime pursuit of learning, social activism and communication. This thread links acting, talk show hosting, reporting, writing, and—more recently—teaching and coaching physicians and executives in the art of communication.

Raised in NYC, from ages 3-8 Joan danced with "The Youngest Ballet Troupe in the World" on *Children's Hour* on NBC. By the time she graduated from high school, her tutu was gathering dust. She attended The Fashion Institute of Technology and briefly considered a career as Fashion Coordinator.

Joan found herself drawn to a more serious world. It was the era of Vietnam and Civil Rights. At the age of 18, she joined the summer program of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), where she worked with an Ojibwa tribe in Northern Minnesota. This experience whetted her appetite for social action. The following year, after Martin Luther King's assassination, she signed up for an Ethical Culture Society community service project in Shorter, Alabama where she lived and worked with teachers from a rural Black farming community to set up a summer school for kids.

Joan now opted to attend the University of Wisconsin in Madison with a major in theater. There, a British professor by the name of A. C. Scott



Photo of Joan Lowery taken at the top of the chair lift at Anacapri, Italy

opened her eyes to Asian Theater techniques and styles, an experience which was to color her life.

Drawn to enter the field of socially conscious political theater, Dr. Scott's influence led Joan to England, which was considered to have the best drama schools preparing for the stage. Joan spent her first year abroad acting in lunch time, pub-based theater in London, as well as performing around the country with Triple Action Shakespearean Theater, one of the better known fringe theater companies.

During her second year of study in London Joan read about the genre of Children's Participational Theater. After graduation, she moved to Boston, where she joined Theater Workshop Boston (TWB) acting and teaching theater in education with performance. At that time grants were given for

bringing original theater into that city's segregated schools to facilitate academic learning and cross-cultural appreciation. Joan worked directly with kids and also trained teachers in workshops lasting 8-12 weeks.

Organizational Psychologist Dr. George Litwin, the Father of Organizational Climate, was impressed by Theater Workshop Boston's groundbreaking work. Dr. Litwin's expertise involved analyzing the management "climate" of a particular company, establishing which skills were

needed to be effective within that climate, then training employees to maximize those particular sets of skills. As an experiment, Litwin brought Joan and other members of Theater Workshop Boston to NYC where they worked with Ivy-League types at Citibank.

Their system of using theater to improve communication skills met with grand success, even among these well-educated groups.

"I love this!" thought Joan. She continued working with Dr. Litwin as a consultant and entered graduate school at Antioch in Cambridge, MA, earning a Master's Degree in Adult Education and Counseling. After graduate school she worked full-time with Litwin, who encouraged her to use her background as an actress to help corporate managers learn new ways of communicating.

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Hans Beltr has been a valuable part of the maintenance staff since he arrived in 2009. Recently, he and his wife Xiomara closed on their first home. The staff and roughly 45 members threw a housewarming party for them at the Club with cake and champagne.



Photo from the Family Swim Night and Pizza Party. See additional photos on pages 16 & 17.

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In 1981 she moved to Sarasota, where she lived for 5 years, first going to Storer Cable as a volunteer, and later hosting and producing her own talk show, *A Woman's View*. It was so successful she was given a second television show, *Sarasota on Review*, and assigned to help create Storer Cable's advertising sales department.

Realizing she wanted to pursue a journalism career, Joan also worked as a talk show host, news reporter and anchor at WQSA News Talk Radio. "For me, being an on-air journalist contained all the elements I loved about working in educational and improvisational theater, but in a context that could reach far more people on a daily basis."

Armed with experience in radio and TV, Joan moved to the San Francisco area in 1986, becoming a free-lance entertainment journalist for Associated Press Radio. She anchored a weekly legal show

at a PBS station in San Mateo and wrote and produced health news and other segments for national television production companies. She went to L.A. for four months, where she covered Hollywood for Associated Press Radio, interviewing rock stars and stage and film actors. Returning to the Bay Area in 1990, Joan became an entertainment reporter on KTVU-TV's popular "Mornings on Two" program where she produced weekly entertainment features.

In 1992, she segued into doing Media Training with Bay Area hospitals, training and coaching physician and executive spokespeople to prepare and present themselves effectively on radio, TV and in print appearances. She utilized the camera as a tool for spokespersons to see themselves in action and improve their media presentation skills.

In 1992, Joan was asked

to bring her media training program to Make Your Point Communications (MYP), a Bay Area company specializing in media and presentation skills trainings for Silicon Valley companies. They became Intel's U.S. media training vendor for the next 14 years, training thousands to communicate effectively with the media.

In 2006, an Intel executive asked MYP Communications to adapt their media training program to professionals who meet regularly with executives in situations where it's critical to communicate with brevity and impact. The company partnered with Intel to create "Making Your Point," taking that course around the globe.

The other side of "Making Your Point" is learning to listen well in order to know what point to make! Their company was again invited to partner with Intel to develop "The Listening Clinic", a customized intensive course

teaching professionals the art of "Slow Listening" – to increase understanding, uncover deeper needs and build trust and rapport while resisting the tendency to move too quickly toward solutions.

Even while jet-setting much of the time, Joan managed to move back to Sarasota in the late 1990's and purchase a Tree House at The Landings to serve as home base. Today this beautiful waterfront home is jam-packed with exotic works of art and crafts gathered from her extensive travels.

Things shifted at Intel a few years ago, and Joan's peripatetic lifestyle slowed down. She transitioned back into working with healthcare providers. Taking a USF class in Health Care Mediation & Negotiation, she soon became involved with The Academy for Emerging Leaders in Patient Safety, a group of physicians and medical educators offering 4-day retreats in Telluride, Colorado,

for medical students and residents. Joan has served on their faculty for the past 4 years, becoming one of the few non-physicians on staff.

Joan currently works with the Committee of Interns and Residents in NYC, training the union's medical residents in a variety of communication skills-related areas. She is also involved in *iLISTEN*, a year-long program for medical residents at Jamaica Hospital, Queens.

Locally, she's on the steering committee for the Embracing our Differences art exhibit. She also worked on Ringling College of Art and Design's Imagination Conversation economic development project. In Joan's words, "I feel truly blessed to be able to use theater, writing, teaching and the media as vehicles for advancing social change."

Find out more at:
www.lowerycommunications.com