



profiles

Common Sense and Friendship

HOPE SCOVILLE

INTERVIEWED BY CONNIE NEIL

Hope Scoville, manager for the past year-and-a-half of On Our Own's Mad Market, had mixed feelings about taking it on: "I've always believed in recycling and have to have challenges in my work. Anything that can relieve the plight of so-called mental patients is meaningful work for me. But, could I do it?"

There have been many changes since Hope took over the store. Sales and donations have more than doubled, as have the paid staff. The program is more rigorous and demanding, and the new location at 1860 Queen Street East proved to be a happy challenge.

"I felt the volunteers weren't benefiting the store or themselves. That had to change if they were to find jobs. I actively sought volunteer members to get their support both in the store and picking up donations and started a more demanding program. I looked for things people liked doing, had knowledge about, or talent for, and gave them responsibility for that area. Originally they were resentful, but in the long run it's better for them so that when they go to other jobs, demanding work won't be such a big change or shock to them. But it was hard for me to do that."

Ron Shannessy worked as a volunteer for a year. "Some days Hope is bright and happy and might ask you to go for a beer after work, and you think 'I've found a friend'. And then sometimes she's critical and might say 'I haven't learned enough. You just never know. But she's a good boss. She gave

me a lot of responsibility, and I'd like to take a job in a store."

Although never institutionalized, Hope's family was full of mental problems. "It isn't a new thing for me. I grew up with it." Her father, who died in 1972, was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic, and her mother was hospitalized involuntarily for three months when Hope was eleven. The ten brothers and sisters, now scattered across Canada, "have forms of madness that are acceptable to this

society — are workaholics, materialistic, driven. Some were hospitalized for suicide attempts or depression, but mostly they're doing okay."

From age three to nine Hope was shifted through the foster home circuit. "I suffered abuse — mostly verbal from my mother and sisters — and some sexual and physical abuse in foster homes, one in particular. They didn't give me enough to eat, kept me in the basement in cold weather and in



the yard in good weather. They just wanted the money to pay their mortgage. But the worst was the confusion of not knowing where you belong, different religions and expectations of how they want you to be. I had a constant turmoil in my mind

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and felt there was no focus. Today these conflicts still mean it's difficult to make decisions."

"At 22, my doctor suggested I see a psychiatrist for depression, which was a disaster. I was naive enough to think I could take him to court and win for his mental abuse and subtle attempt at seduction. He sent me to his ex-lover, a left-over hippie psychologist, who socialized with her patients and told things revealed in confidence. Then there were three other psychiatrists and a G.P. which was one of my better therapy experiences."

For Hope the solution lay in self-help groups. She replied to an ad and came to the drop-in. "I had found my home, my family and felt comfortable. When I was alone, I thought I must be really crazy if I can't get along with my psychiatrist, thought that I was the only exception. But here were many who felt the same way, and it made me feel better about myself, less alone. I could hear others' problems, get support and sometimes provide it for others. We talk about how we feel in the present. At the general meetings I was very impressed and realized many intelligent, articulate people suffered problems and not me alone. Through the *Mad Market*, I find acceptance and satisfaction that I am doing useful work to bring money and skills to the members."

Before coming to manage the store Hope worked long hours in a dress-making house and felt the work to be exploitative: "I really couldn't live or die so some rich old bag could have a \$400 dress while others were starving in Toronto. Life had to mean more than that. I promised myself to get into meaningful work and, it turned out to be the *Mad Market*."

Russell Guspie, her husband since a December 28, 1982 ceremony in the drop-in, says: "I was immediately

attracted to Hope, but it was several weeks before we had our first date. Before that evening was out, it was as if we had known each other all our lives. Without a doubt, some of the best times that Hope and I have shared have been at the drop-in, with other members of On Our Own. And I know that when the day comes that we are leaving Toronto, we will have only one regret — that we can't take you all with us."

They talked of marriage from the beginning, but Hope felt with her mood swings it wasn't for her. Four months ago she changed her mind: "My expectations are more reasonable now. I'll always keep part of my life separate, not build everything around the relationship. It's more healthy that way. I expect less and he is less selfish. We both compromised. It's a first marriage for us both. I guess we're both cautious. I want to have children, but have some misgivings about both hereditary and learned consequences. If I'd married ten years ago, I might have been the same pattern as my mother,

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but now I don't think I would be abusive. With my concerns about over-population, I'd prefer to be a foster parent to an older child or to adopt unless the agency would rule me out because of my psychiatric treatment. I think it's good they investigate, unless they have a fixed idea that psychiatric treated people are totally unfit to be parents."

Before Hope joined the group, she had a phobia about groups of people, probably a result of her childhood experiences. But recently she has overcome it to a point where she accepts speaking engagements at universities, and on radio and television. "At first, at the general meetings, when they go around the circle to give your name and a bit about yourself, I thought I'd die. Later, when I had to give the store report, I almost did die. The job helped overcome that. I had to force myself to get over it and persevere. Now I'm more comfortable generally in groups. It was much later that I could go to be a speaker. This has probably been the most help that

the group has been to me. You have to just push out of these things yourself."

For Hope, nightly medication of amitripyline and etrafon has levelled out the mood swings. "I think the medication will always be necessary. It was like being in a long dark tunnel and unable to see the light at the end. Sometimes I'd have a clear thought in my mind, but the sentence would come out all scrambled. Now, although there's a feeling of deadness, I'd rather have that than the mood swings. Therapy, which my doctor insists on as a condition of giving me the medication, makes me feel guilty about things that never bothered me before. The constant living in the past is not helpful. It's not a pure science: people can't know enough to delve into other minds and their problems.

"I put the past behind me and the *Mad Market* work became the involving focus for me. Don't go for therapy thinking it will be an exciting experience to have an intelligent person listen to your problems. No one can solve your problems. It isn't all them trying to make psychiatric patients of us, but some of us who make careers out of what looks like a comfortable dependent life. Try a little harder to find common sense solutions, or talk with friends, not professionals. There's no magic there. That's where the problems start."

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Contact:
(Mrs.) Tanya Harris
177 College St.
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(416) 979-2156,
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