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PROFILE: Interview with Zandra Bell

I haven't met Shirley Best yet but I will on October 6th at the ALL Women event near Toronto. She may be better known in Edmonton or Calgary but we know she is going to be a hit with this crowd of engaged women leaders. Shirley sounds like quite a character – very funny and insightful as well, so I can't wait.

To bridge the gap, I talked recently with Shirley's creator, Zandra Bell, who will also be there that night where the topic of women of action, intent and strength will be front and centre. This event is geared to empowering and inspiring women to be more than they perhaps even thought possible. No doubt, there will be turning points occurring in the hearts and minds of many throughout those assembled after hearing some of the scheduled speakers tell their stories.

One person not attending is Jane and she will happily not be missed - fast forward to the past.

Jane was living in an abusive relationship in South Western Ontario. There was emotional abuse and, at times, things got violent (being punched in the face does actually make you see stars just like in the cartoons). Despite little support from those close to her, Jane decided to start a new life and so she moved out West to Alberta leaving that part of her life behind. When she left, Jane was left behind as well and Zandra became her new identity and a new way of life.

"There was no ah ha moment", says Zandra, "but a gradual process of coming to know myself." None the less, this was a turning point. For Zandra was not only enjoying her new management position as a Regional

Director with the federal government, she was also discovering that she could take care of herself by staying away from negative personalities. Adding to this positive self-image, Zandra was finding success performing in local theatre and festivals, especially those opportunities where her comedic talents could shine. And shine they did which led to the creation of a character that Zandra named “Shirley Best”.

It is often said that it takes an especially brilliant mind to do comedy. Zandra is another example for she has not only found an outlet for her creative energy but has gone one step more in melding what is in effect an internal operational consult into a one hour, one woman comedy show for corporate employees. It is also often said that women can multi-task whereas men have trouble just running the lawn mower, but here are another three hats for Zandra:

- 1.** Zandra immerses herself in the company culture and actually goes on site to learn how they do what they say they do.
- 2.** She analyses her findings and determines relevant issues that she can feed back to the company’s employees in a humourous way that will make them feel good about their work and the challenges they face. This is all ultimately written into her presentation.
- 3.** She then performs all this in a one hour, one woman show in the character of “Shirley”. Zandra notes that “ Everyone has a Shirley in their life. She is your mother...times ten or the eccentric aunt that fuels the other relative’s gossip, but garners their reluctant admiration for telling it like it is.”

So Shirley points out the key issues in a company in a way that allows everyone to see them for what they are through humour and insight. “Shirley is freeing”, says Zandra, who freely admits that “I get to express my opinions through Shirley”.

Progressive companies give these customized presentations rave reviews. “This is, in fact, a new way of having a Keynote Speaker,” says Zandra, who is quick to point out that “this isn’t just entertainment but relevant content - a fresh look at company issues in a way that refreshes, motivates, and inspires.”

If you can imagine having Zandra visit your company and her getting to know who you are from the employee's perspective, you can visit her site. If you are in the Toronto area on October 6th, come see her at our ALL Women event.

"It's been a rocky road," says Zandra, "but over time I became stronger in my self-esteem, more confident, and more determined to create the positive life I deserve. I've made it work. Now it's important to me to let other women know that if they are experiencing abuse, they are not alone and that they are not the problem as an abuser would have them believe. They are a victim that has been betrayed, yes – but I want them to understand that they too have the courage and the power to make change and manifest a very different reality. Hopefully, they will find their turning point as well."

FEEDBACK

Award winning motivational humorist Zandra Bell is well known on the national conference scene for creating original, intelligent hilarity to inspire, and enhance human potential. A member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers, Zandra is the driving force behind the innovative "infotainment" company, "At Wit's End", specializing in customized motivational presentations, specifically researched, and created according to her clients' business objectives,performed in the persona of her hilarious alter ego the charmingly outrageous, hit sensation, Shirley Best, a campy, yet charismatic sixty-something housewife on a search for self fulfillment. www.zandrabell.com