

The Goddess of Gumption

by Andrea Warner and Tamara Letkeman

From the raucous realm of rock ‘n’ roll to the daring and dangerous edges of skateboarding, Maureen Jack-LaCroix has emerged as Vancouver’s golden girl of promotion. Her entrepreneurial moxie has always embraced a bottom line emphasizing social change—and now, the ingenious impresario is summoning all her brilliance to take on her most daunting challenge yet.

“It’s a profound shift in consciousness to truly value the ‘we’ over the ‘me.’”

Within minutes of meeting Maureen Jack-LaCroix, it becomes clear that she is as wild as the free-flowing mane of silver curls that frames her delicate facial features. Energy and enthusiasm seem to pulse off her as we settle into an interview that underscores her talent as one of Vancouver’s best “connectors”: a networker and a weaver of ideas and people. She’s a rare find—a hybrid who’s equally comfortable working with concepts (the world of ideas) and practicality (the world of action).

Early in her career, Maureen established herself as a producer and impresario who could engineer projects at the highest of levels. But she’s perhaps best known for taking a teenage sport thought to be populated by juvenile delinquents—skateboarding—and making it a respectable and even celebrated part of urban life. Maureen, whose son is a boarder, did it through the creation of Slam City Jam, a three-day festival of skate culture and music—and the longest-running event of its kind in North America.

It was a tough undertaking. Maureen recounts bumping up against City Council, the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association, and the Chief of Police, following a cover story in Thrasher magazine that featured one of the world’s top boarders bombing down a metal railing in Vancouver.

“The business association guy held it up and was like, ‘Look at this! Look at this!’,” she recalls. “And I laughed, and said, ‘Yeah, can you imagine doing that?’”



Before skateboarding, it was music. A classically trained pianist, Maureen stepped into the rock 'n' roll scene after a college boyfriend enlisted her help in making a documentary about a band. She went on to become the band's manager, and found herself thrust into a near-exclusive—and notoriously ruthless—boys' club: the music industry.

The more intimate she became with the scene, the more appalled she was at the way musicians were being shafted, from contracts that resembled “master-slave” relationships to banks that rejected loan requests to replace broken instruments. Not content to merely play “backup,” Maureen founded a series of seminars on the music industry, which ultimately grew into New Music West, the biggest new music event in Western North America.

“It grew organically because it was of value, until we had 200 bands together showcasing in 20 venues, 150 talent scouts out from 75 labels internationally,” Maureen says. “It was a wonderful appreciation of our music and what was coming up from the grassroots of our creativity.”

And the hit parade doesn't stop there. Maureen's other credits include working closely with Bruce Allen, Bryan Adams, and David Foster to produce “Tears are Not Enough,” the song recorded in '85 by a supergroup of Canadian artists to raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia.

It's a star-studded resumé, to be sure, and it's about to get fortified even more. Because now, Maureen's entire career and set of producing experiences have aligned for her most important work yet. Get ready, Vancouver, for “Be the Change.”

A grassroots movement, Be the Change is bringing people together to combat global warming. Through a series of symposiums, it takes the huge and daunting concept of “saving the environment” and breaks it down into manageable chunks to show how our small, everyday contributions—like riding our bikes instead of driving, or composting our kitchen scraps—can result in permanent change. As the name suggests, “Be the Change” is about what you can do. “This is no longer the time to marginalize our environmentalists,” Maureen stresses. “It's not ‘They have to fix the problem and deal with it.’ What are our values? Who are we as a community?”

“The best part of how big this global mind shift is,” she continues, “is that it's truly ego-shattering—it's so humbling to face the enormity of the task at hand, to fully recognize that I am not in control. ‘I’ cannot solve this problem. But ‘we’ can. It's a profound shift in consciousness to truly value the ‘we’ over the ‘me.’”

The monthly, one-day symposiums are slated throughout Vancouver for the rest of this year. Participants are encouraged to bring the message back to their communities—but not to preach it. The philosophy is that as an individual changes, he or she will inevitably lead by example.

The ultimate goal? To get 1,000 Vancouverites to reduce their energy consumption by 20 per cent and, among other initiatives, increase their use of local organic produce by the same amount. In October, members and the public will gather for the first Be the Change Festival, featuring inspirational speakers, interactive workshops on climate change, plus music, film, dance, and poetry.

This is a project of—if you will—global proportions. But it's also an idea that's been germinating for 20-some-odd years. Shortly after Maureen finished working on "Tears are Not Enough," she wrote her first proposal for an environmental event. Unfortunately, it didn't take hold.

"At that time I thought we needed to have stars to endorse something for it to go," she explains. "It needed to be powerful people that were behind it, and I was a young woman and I didn't feel all that powerful. It never left me though."

In fact, for the last several years, Maureen has had a quote from R. Buckminster Fuller, the American inventor, architect, author, mathematician, and futurist, affixed to her mirror: If success or failure of this planet and of human beings depended on how I am and what I do... how would I be? What would I do?

"I didn't know," she says, in answer to the first question. "But I knew I had to be different from the way I was."

In response to question no. 2, Maureen's taken a hiatus from her very successful company, Jack of Hearts Productions—and thus her income—to form the Be the Change Earth Alliance. It wasn't an easy move.

"That entailed letting go of my attachment to the illusion of independence," she says. "Of my self-worth being attached to how much money I made, and of my attachment to being in control. Not easy, letting go without knowing what will come in its place."

With a string of such wildly successful events backing her up, it's a leap of faith the premier producer and impresario can probably afford. After all, this is the same woman who championed skateboarding and took on the music industry—and the passage of time has done little to curb her defiant spirit.

"Ideally, I've become a wiser rebel," she says. "But I think it's really healthy for all of us to have a little rebel inside, because otherwise we just spend so much energy compromising to fit in that we don't explore all of who we can be."

Freelance writer Andrea Warner and SharedVISION editor Tamara Letkeman also have a little rebel inside. They just need some help coaxing her out sometimes.