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The Woman Today

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Cynthia Bradley

Combining Family and Business A Winning Blend

by Heidi Ash

A devoted mother and grandmother and a tireless business woman, Cynthia Bradley's artistic flair has made an imprint on everything she does. Cynthia and her husband Michael have been married for forty-three years and have spent the last thirty years building their interior design business, Floor to Ceiling. They love working together and enjoy each other's company twenty-four hours a day.

The couple admits that at times it has been difficult to separate their work and private lives. In the beginning, it was harder to leave the business behind when they locked the store for the night; now, however, they are able to leave it in the capable hands of their two sons.

Cynthia and Michael raised three children along with running their business. Sons Patrick and Sean chose to follow the footsteps of their parents into the family business. Daughter Erin is in Boston studying to become a nurse practitioner.

Life Takes a Turn

Cynthia taught junior high school art classes in Ohio before marrying Michael who was a Navy pilot. They traveled around the world in the service before settling in Minneapolis where Michael worked for Northwest Airlines. Then the airline strike changed everything.

With no flying jobs available, Michael started selling home interior products. When a home improvement store in Duluth became available, Michael wanted to move north and buy the business. Cynthia was willing to go to Duluth,



Patrick, Cynthia, and Sean Bradley

photo by LePage Photography

but insisted this was as far north as she wanted to go.

From the beginning, the business has taken a lot of energy, almost like raising another child. Through difficult times together, Cynthia and Michael persevered, always feeling it was better having two heads instead of one to solve problems.

The Family Tradition

The couple and their sons continue to work together in the family business. "I have to be careful in the role of mother and boss, especially since my sons are now in charge," says Cynthia. "They know how the business works. I do my decorating and help with displays and the general look of the store."

All of the children had a choice about coming into the business. The boys are glad they did and agree working with their parents is special. All of them have thrived with the family interaction.

"We wear so many hats that we're not

in each other's way," says Patrick. "To have family members around with the same vested interest and with the amount of experience that my mother and father have is an incredible asset."

Growing up, Patrick says he learned morals and values from his parents who made all the children responsible for their own actions and did not bail them out if they got in trouble. Patrick feels his mother is a mentor to him in both the business world and life. "Of course," he adds, "since she is my mother, if I didn't do the job right, I'd get yelled at twice."

Sean was also quick to list morals and values as lessons learned from his mother. "I learned everyday in the way she conducted her life and the business," he says.

His appreciation of the arts also came from his mother. "Mom taught me to take chances with art," says Sean. Both Patrick and Sean appreciate the time they spent with their mother growing up and agree they want to raise their chil-

dren in the same way that they were raised.

Cynthia still works at Floor to Ceiling where she adds the artistic flair to the store's ambiance and occasionally helps out with customers. Spending time with customers and making sure they are completely satisfied are business traditions Cynthia has always believed are important.

Not All Work

In her rare free time, Cynthia enjoys oil painting, mostly outdoor themes. Recently, she has taken up knitting. Her true bliss is making her surroundings look beautiful whether it is their house on the St. Louis River or cabin in Grand Marais where they enjoy snowmobiling.

Sharing her home with friends and giving dinners and parties make Cynthia happy. Whenever possible, the entire family comes over to the house to share a meal and to enjoy each other's company away from the workplace.



Cynthia with her 36 inch long Lake Trout caught on Lake Nueltin, west of Hudson Bay on the Arctic Circle. This Lake is a catch and release lake and a barbless hook was used.

Cynthia and Michael also enjoy fishing. Every year they go to Alaska, Canada, or elsewhere to fish. They have fished on some of the most beautiful and best fishing lakes in the world such as Great Slave and Great Bear Lake in Alaska and the Tree River on the Arctic Circle. When they cannot escape that far, they fish in the river in their back yard. "We come home from work," says Cynthia, "and have to fish."

Looking at this petite woman one would never guess she caught the seventh biggest Northern Pike in Manitoba in 2002. It was forty-seven inches long. Cynthia is also a Master Angler in both Lake Trout and Pike in Manitoba. This means she has caught five trophy fish in each species. While she is reeling in her fish, her husband hangs on to her to lend his support.

Cynthia knows she and her husband do not want to work forever. They do, however, want to continue helping out with the family business they built. It is a creative outlet for her where she can share what she knows and loves with her husband, her sons, and the extended family of their employees and customers. Combining business skills and a love of family has indeed been a winning combination for Cynthia Bradley. ♦