

## **Interviews with Truly Extraordinary Women: Jane Ranshaw, Founder and Owner, Jane Ranshaw & Associates, Inc.**

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By Theresa Gapp

Depending on the barriers to entry, getting into business can be easy, but staying there can be difficult. After founding Jane Ranshaw and Associates, Inc., in 1976, Jane is still in business years later because she found a balance between self-employment and entrepreneurship.

As I strolled along Lake Shore Drive to Jane's home, I recalled the times I have witnessed her in action quietly networking at a UCWBG gathering or a meeting of the Independent Writers of Chicago. (Her friends say she reminds them of the actress Holly Hunter from Broadcast News because of her perky manner and just a tinge of an endearing drawl.) She has a way of building relationships that lead to success, but she would insist that the relationships are what are more important to her.

### **Has your definition of success changed over time?**

Definitely. When I was younger, I would have had a fairly traditional MBA view. You know, this is success, having a lovely apartment and a nice address. However, long ago, I realized that this definition would have pretty empty if that's all you have.

I'm at a point where I really don't spend much time looking back. I have always said that I might regret things I've done, but I do not want to regret things I haven't done. Overall, I think it is a matter of being content. Success is also about finding new challenges and doing new things. That's why I do not plan to ever retire. When you retire, it's nice for a few days, but what do you do on Tuesday?

### **Describe a critical turning point in your life. How did you handle the transition?**

I have probably had two critical points. I graduated (from Indiana University) in the mid 1960's and I came out of college with the idea that I wanted to work a year or two and then get married. Somewhere around 1970 I thought, "Wait a minute. I didn't realize..." and it started to hit me that maybe I wouldn't get married at all. I started taking myself a bit more seriously--taking more responsibility for my life. This is about the time that I went back to graduate school full time.

### **What would you have done differently?**

People may think this sounds weird, coming from me, but I wish I weren't so timid.

### **Were you timid back then?**

I think I still am.

### **But your version of timid makes you appear humble and gentle.**

I think of it as holding back, not doing what I ought to be doing. At the same time, fear of being a wimp has made me push myself more.

**You said there were two critical points.**

The second was getting married.

**When did you marry?**

In 1978. I was 33 and getting married for the first time. I realized I was sharing my life with another person. Now I had to learn it wasn't all just about me. It changed the way I viewed others—I have to give, and not take as much. Not long after Lou and I were married, I met a wonderful older woman who also influenced my life. Knowing her made me realize how much we continue to learn from other people. Her name is Dorothy...she was so centered and content with who she was—and so loving.

**Sort of like a *Tuesdays with Morrie* person.**

Exactly. Of course, there have been other turning points, such as having a brain aneurysm in 1988. It showed me how fragile life is. I'm now more appreciative of the here and now.

**Do you have any heroes?**

Eleanor Roosevelt. She was so persistent in pursuing her beliefs and humane in her goals. I conduct workshops on managing emotions at work, and I always display a poster with my favorite quote of hers:

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

**What unique challenges did you face as a woman in your career?**

A: I am in a field that is fairly open to women. I started as a technical writer, went into training and then progressed to so-called soft skills like listening, managing emotions, and being able to communicate with others in the workplace. It's worked out well for me.

But I remember being interviewed by a firm when I was coming out of the MBA program at Chicago. A man interviewing me said he was sure I wouldn't be hired; he was talking to me only because, by law, they had to talk to everyone. I was furious. I went to Dick Thane, who was Dean of Placement at the time, and complained rather vigorously. Dick was a wonderful support for women in the program, and he made sure I received a letter of apology from the recruiter. At least it was something and I'm sure that man was more careful of what he said in interviews.

I think things are a little better now, but not as much I would have hoped after nearly 30 years. I think that's why so many women go out on their own—they just won't put up with that stuff.

**Do you think women are on their own because of the glass ceiling?**

I have talked with a lot of women who ended on their own after becoming so frustrated with corporate life. Here's the problem: maybe 15% of the time you meet a jerk like the guy who interviewed me who makes no bones about being biased. You know you're not going to get the job because you're a woman. Period.

Others times, maybe as much as 15%, you say, "The man who got that job really was better qualified."

The worst part is, that leaves as much as 70% of the time when you don't know whether you missed an opportunity because of discrimination or you are unqualified. It leaves you with a lot of uncertainty and can lead to self-doubt.

**What aspects of the UCWBG have you been pleased with? Is there anything you would like to change?**

I am pleased with how the group keeps trying to change to meet the needs of its members. When I started with the group, it was more oriented to corporate women and less so to entrepreneurs. Over the years, it has become a much more caring and supportive group.

As a "senior" member, I want less *from* groups and more chances to give back. I still have a lot to learn, but it's more specialized now. I would like to see the group have more career day events, with experienced women talking about what they do and sharing their life expertise with others.

**Given your experience as an interviewer, what question would you like to be asked?**

I'm always curious about what people do when they aren't working. My husband and I love going to movies and plays, and we're big antique buffs. Although if you see the places we go to find things, you might think it's more like junk. I love reading and always have; I probably 60 to 70 books a year. I travel to New York several times a year and nearly always treat myself to a Broadway play.

**What advice would you give women today?**

Be aware that, in business and in life, it's the people part that's the hardest. For example, I see people in my writing classes who have decent writing skills, but have style conflicts with their boss. People get caught up in being right, rather than flexing to others' needs. It's the same with listening; people listen to make points—to argue—rather than to really hear what the other person is saying. The answer is not to worry so much about being right; focus more on understanding.

Everyone should listen to herself, her own common sense. I think of it as listening to your own voice. If we think about it for a few minutes, we often know what is right for us and what isn't. We just need to work up the courage to trust ourselves.