

Guelph Y Women of Distinction 2018

Statement of Nomination: Lisa Browning

Categories: Arts & Culture; Community Champion; Health, Wellness, and Fitness

i) Individual Achievement

- a) How Lisa represents her categories: Lisa firmly believes that everything in life happens for a reason, and that reason is our highest good. She believes that it is through challenge and adversity that we develop our strength. As a writer, editor, and publisher, she uses the power of telling our stories and speaking our truth, as well as other creative outlets, to empower others to turn their darkness into light.

She has published six anthologies to date: four in the *Sharing: our stories, our selves, our success* series (two anthologies of women's stories, and two anthologies of men's stories). Authors of those stories indicated how empowering it was to be involved in the project, while the readers of the anthologies indicated how empowering it was to read the stories, and to realize that we are not alone.

When Lisa's father passed away in Hospice Wellington in 2015, she reached out to her vast community of contacts, and collected stories from 52 writers. She covered all costs of producing 500 copies of a book entitled *You Are Not Alone: 52 stories of hope*, and is donating 100% of all proceeds from sales to Hospice Wellington. To date, over \$4,000 has been raised from this project.

Her latest anthology, entitled *Telling Your Story, Speaking Your Truth: a path to empowerment*, contains stories from authors who have been published by One Thousand Trees. Lisa gives this book away to those who are interested in writing, but don't necessarily know how to get started.

- b) Turning Point: From 2009 to 2012, Lisa was involved in a relationship with a very emotionally/verbally abusive man. Through this experience, she came to realize that emotional/verbal abuse is just as damaging, if not more so, than physical/sexual abuse. Because there are no physical scars or bruises, often the abuse is downplayed or ignored. This was Lisa's experience at first; however, the abuse eventually got so bad that Lisa ended up in hospital under Form 1 (commonly known as suicide watch), severely depressed, dehydrated, and exhausted. She became an outpatient of Homewood for a period of six months, attending counselling, classes and workshops, and doing a tremendous amount of reflection and reading, in order to heal from the effects of PTSD. Rather than let this experience defeat her, she has gone on to tell her story, both in written form and by speaking publicly, and is currently working on a book entitled *Metamorphosis: from the darkness of abuse to the light of empowerment*. She has also started Roots & Wings, dedicated to mental health awareness and empowerment through creativity.

ii) Role Model and Leadership

- a) Lisa as a mentor to others: Through One Thousand Trees and its various branches, Lisa provides an opportunity for others to tell their story and speak their truth. In addition to the *Sharing* anthologies, she publishes inspirational books, either fiction or non-fiction, that have a health/wellness, creativity or community service flavour. Most of the books she publishes have a charitable component (ie a percentage of proceeds is donated to a charity related to the subject matter). Saplings, her children's book publishing branch, provides an opportunity for young people to have their stories or artwork published, and Forget-Me-Not provides an opportunity for seniors to tell their life stories, and have them published for friends and family.

In addition to her publishing services, Lisa hosts a monthly *Evening of Sharing*, where she brings in speakers on a variety of topics (also health/wellness, creativity, community service related), and invites members of the community to be part of a discussion. These evenings are free of charge.

She also facilitates a monthly *Creative Intentions* group, providing exposure to a different creative outlet (ie painting, pottery, zentangle) each month. Plans are in the works for *Artist's Way* groups, using a 12-session workshop plan Lisa developed, using Julia Cameron's book of the same name, and Lisa is scheduled to co-lead a workshop on self-publishing in the spring of 2018.

- b) How Lisa has demonstrated vision and leadership, and made positive change: Lisa has provided an opportunity for many people, including children, to have their work published. Many of those people did not know it was possible, or even where to start, before they were connected to Lisa.

Proceeds from the books published by One Thousand Trees and/or Saplings have promoted and/or benefited charities and non-profits, including Hospice Wellington, The Guelph Humane Society, Little Brothers Little Sisters of Guelph-Wellington, The Ewings Cancer Foundation of Canada, and The Alzheimer Society of Guelph and Wellington.

Lisa is a strong supporter of community organizations and initiatives that support the empowerment of others, particularly women and children. In the past two years, she has donated over 150 copies of her anthologies to the *Basketeers* project in support of Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis, and she made a donation of gift packages for the attendees of the YMCA's *Power of Being a Girl* conference this year.

iii) Contribution to the Wellbeing of her Village

- a) How Lisa is involved in the community: Through her monthly online magazine, and her inspirational Facebook presence, Lisa serves as a light to others. She provides not only the opportunity for others to tell their stories and express themselves creatively, but also a way for those who may be struggling to see that there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

The books she publishes through One Thousand Trees (anthologies and fiction/non-fiction for adults and young adults) and Saplings (illustrated children's books) always have an element of hope and inspiration.

The groups she leads (*Creative Intentions*, *Sharing Evenings*, *Artist's Way*) provide further opportunity for connection, creativity, and empowerment.

Through social media, Lisa's reach far extends the Guelph community. With authors in the United States, England, and Australia, she has shone a light on Guelph, in the lives of people outside of Canada, who may never have heard of this city before.

To whom it may concern:

Re: Lisa Browning

I am honoured and privileged to be a part of the nomination of Lisa Browning for a Guelph Y Women of Distinction Award. Since meeting Lisa two years ago my life has been forever changed and I am so fortunate to be given this opportunity to give something back to her.

I had always believed that “numbers were my thing” and I was not creative enough to be a writer. However, after losing my father in 2013 and my grandmother in 2014, I felt compelled to write a children’s book, in order to help children deal with grief, particularly my own children. The book sat on my computer for 2 years as I tried to figure out how to publish a book and to gather the courage to let others read my story.

I was eventually connected with Lisa through a mutual acquaintance. Immediately, we felt a connection as we had both recently lost our fathers. During that meeting, Lisa made me believe in myself and helped me understand the impact my story could have on others who are suffering. Not only did she agree to publish my book, but she offered to publish the book at no cost, if I would agree to donate at least a portion of my net proceeds to Hospice Wellington; something I immediately agreed to. This is an example of Lisa’s ability and desire to empower others and allow them to heal through the gift of storytelling. Her willingness and passion to help those in need, as someone who has suffered herself, are traits that we should all aspire to.

Lisa continues to work with authors throughout the City of Guelph, providing them with a voice through her selfless actions; her sole guiding motive is “empowerment of others”. Her desire to help her fellow travelers heal through words and the ancient art of story telling is compelling.

Not only did Lisa give me a new belief in myself, she gave my children the gift of being able to see their mother in a new light; as an author and as someone who gives to others during their time of need. Since meeting Lisa, I feel as though the real me has been released and I feel the freedom to express the “true me” in ways I never believed possible.

Lisa’s contribution to individual authors like myself are part of her story; her desire to make a difference at places like Hospice Wellington, where people are given the freedom to “fly free from their earthly cocoon” is yet another. Since publishing my book, Grampa’s Butterfly, my life has been forever altered as I am now being asked to do book readings at public schools, libraries and fundraising events. All of this was made possible because someone, Lisa Browning, believed in my story and believed in me. 😊

Margaret-Ann Brooks
Author, Grampa’s Butterfly

December 10, 2017

To whom it may concern

Re: Lisa Browning, Women of Distinction Award nominee

I am honored to submit this testimonial on behalf of Lisa Browning, nominated for a Women of Distinction Award.

On January 19, 2013, Lisa Browning (at that time unknown to me) read a post I had made on Cheryl Richardson's Facebook page and felt a connection. Rather than ignore it, she reached out to me; she made a connection. She said that my words resonated with her and in that instant, by that simple action, I felt empowered, and my story validated. At that particular moment in my life, having my thoughts and feelings validated was water in a desert...a life jacket in a turbulent sea.

Lisa's invitation to participate in the first volume of *Sharing* turned my tide. It gave me something to concentrate on, something positive in a negative world. It gave me hope.

I had no confidence in myself, but she did. She allowed me a forum to live a lifelong dream. She nurtured me to take the first step, to become a more authentic and better me. Most importantly, she allowed me to be able to live the dream at my ability. There were no demands, no rules, no criticisms, no judgement. "Just give me your best work, and be your most authentic self. Just be you...that's enough."

In a world where everyone has an angle, a scheme, an agenda, Lisa did not. She reached out, to another soul, who was hurting. She extended a hand, and in one simple act...threw out a life line to a drowning soul. The book....that was just gravy....something additional to an already human experience.

A stranger reached out to me, helped me look at myself, and reflect it back to the world. It wasn't the easiest thing I have ever done, but it was by far one of the best things I have ever done. It made me stop and take inventory of what I wanted, and what I didn't. It gave me strength and confidence in myself.

Lisa's work is important, but it isn't work as much as it is a calling. It's a calling to bring together the power, the strength and the healing of others, so that they can be all that they can be. Although Lisa may be struggling deeply with her own demons and issues, she gains strength by and through the helping of others, and in that struggle she finds herself and her purpose. That's pretty darn inspiring and damn powerful.

Lisa does good things. Those things change the world. Hers are not the actions of loud tumbling waves, that crash and recede with each surge. They are the quiet actions of a single stone thrown into a pond, that creates a soft ripple effect. Each ring travels outward, reaching further and further, forever taking with it the energy of the stone.

Catherine Skiles Chavez

Contributing Author, *Sharing: our stories, our selves, our success*, Volume 1

December 11, 2017

Women of Distinction Award
Guelph YMCA
130 Woodland Glen
Guelph, Ontario
N1G 4M3

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter in regards to a testimonial for Lisa Browning. I was so thrilled and excited to be asked to do this. The week prior I had heard an advertisement on the radio about the Women of Distinction Award and shared with my co-worker that Lisa would be a perfect candidate for this award. I am delighted that a friend and colleague had the same idea! I am honoured to be able to speak of Lisa's involvement in our community.

I had the pleasure of meeting Lisa Browning at a Creative Intentions event. This is a monthly event that Lisa established to bring people together to share in creative activities. Each month Lisa organizes a different activity. This is one of the many gatherings Lisa has created.

Aside from the Creative Intentions meetings, Lisa brings an Evening of Sharing to the community each month. This involves bringing in speakers on a specific topic of interest, and providing an opportunity for people to be included in discussion about the topic.

"Roots and Wings" is another initiative that Lisa began, to help change the way society perceives mental health. The concept is to provide mental health awareness and empowerment through creativity. Lisa has given me the opportunity to embark on this initiative with her.

I am in awe of the amount of time, money, and energy Lisa dedicates to improving our community. Lisa has a huge heart. She spends countless hours giving back to others and is always looking for new ways to deliver a safe, loving, and welcoming environment. Lisa provides many opportunities to benefit others in healing, growing, and learning with intention.

I have only touched on a small amount of what Lisa offers the community. Lisa Browning is a very generous and beautiful soul. She deserves public recognition for the many gifts she brings to our community!

Sincerely yours,
Leah MacCannell

December 10, 2017

Women of Distinction Nominee: Lisa Browning

Women of Distinction Awards Committee,

Please accept this letter as a testimonial for a very deserving Women of Distinction nominee, Lisa Browning. I have known Lisa for four years and my life and my son's life have been forever changed since meeting her. Lisa has been instrumental in creating so many memorable and inspiring opportunities for everyone she meets. She is truly a hero in our local community and supports so many local organizations (Hospice Wellington, Guelph Humane Society, Children's Foundation of Guelph and Wellington).

My son (Noah) and I have had incredible experiences and so many doors have opened because of Lisa's passion to reach out and change the world. Through my son's involvement in the Junior Humane Club at the Guelph Humane Society, he was invited to rewrite Peter Watson's original story called *Angel Has Her Wings*. The rewritten story is about the loss of a pet (cat). Noah rewrote the story for an audience of his peers (grades 4 through 6). This experience has opened the door for my son to meet so many amazing people through a variety of really cool events, all of which have been organized and initiated by Lisa: book launch and signing, being a VIP at the *Just for Cats* Film Festival (hosted by the Guelph Humane Society), a reading event at the Guelph Public Library, he was interviewed by the Guelph Mercury and has been fortunate to attend many other prestigious events (Guelph Humane Society Open House etc.) as a young published author. In August 2017, Lisa organized a ceremony at the Guelph Humane Society and presented the GHS with the money raised from the *Angel Has Her Wings* book sales. GHS Summer Camp participants were able to bear witness to this truly remarkable event with the take home messages "dare to dream" and "follow your heart" because you never know where it will lead you.

The actual experience in rewriting this book about grief and loss has had a profound and maturing impact on my son and has helped him prepare for other losses that he has unfortunately had to experience since writing the book. As a young author, this experience led to a regular column (What I Know) in the monthly edition of Lisa's One Thousand Trees online magazine. Noah was able to share "what he knows" on a variety of topics (Traditions, Alternative Medicines) which has added to his growing wisdom, self-esteem and self-confidence.

My son's involvement in the *Angel Has Her Wings* Project has been a life changer. At 10 years old he was able to add published author to his resumé. How many kids have an opportunity like this? This opportunity was facilitated by Lisa. Lisa is selfless and is always looking for opportunities to put others in the "spotlight" where she gracefully moves behind the scenes, orchestrating everyone's success with integrity and honour.

With our connection to Lisa, opportunities continued to present themselves as gifts, which paved the way for me to co-author a book with Anthea Helps titled, *My Parents Aren't NOOBS!* With technology use on the rise, this heartfelt story for children (age 5-8) and parents highlights the importance of technology (video games) with today's generation of youth. Lisa supports your ideas and develops a plan to make them happen. Lisa's boundless energy is infectious.

All of these incredible experiences were made possible because of Lisa. Lisa makes things happen and is truly a champion for others. She works hard and has a wealth of connections. Lisa's humbleness lends her to work behind the scenes ensuring that everyone she meets has an opportunity to gleam in the spotlight and relish in their "15 minutes of fame." I now think it is time for Lisa Browning to move from the shadows of everyone else's accomplishments to rightfully stand in her own spotlight as the recipient of a 2018 Women of Distinction Award.

Sincerely,

Michelle Nogueira

Lisa Browning – Biography

Lisa Browning moved from Toronto to Guelph in 1990, and considers it one of the best decisions she ever made. She is the mother of one daughter, and Nana to one granddaughter, who she sees as often as she can.

In addition to a full-time job as Assistant Manager, Graduate & Professional Programs at the Ontario Universities' Application Centre, she runs a "sideline" business called One Thousand Trees, offering editing, publishing, and mentoring services. Through One Thousand Trees, she also publishes an online monthly magazine, and provides various networking/educational opportunities in the community.

Lisa received a BA in English from York University in 1988, and subsequently worked as an editor for a Toronto-based publishing firm for over fifteen years. In recent years, she rediscovered her passion for writing, and has had essays and articles published in a variety of online and print magazines. Lisa founded One Thousand Trees in 2010, with the publication of the first issue of a monthly online magazine of the same name. Branches of One Thousand Trees now include Saplings (children's publishing), Roots & Wings (mental health awareness and empowerment through creativity), and Forget-Me-Not (seniors' stories).

No matter what she does, Lisa is inspired to make a difference in this world, to empower others, and help them realize their passion, through telling their story and speaking their truth.