

TIP of the HAT

Laura Scarfo of Mainstream Clothiers

By Gillian Cormier

Laura Scarfo is anything but your mainstream entrepreneur. At just 23, she opened Mainstream Clothiers, a boutique for the funky, free-spirited woman. Her vision of a store that catered to attitude more than age took hold in downtown Oakville. Now, over 15 years later, she's doing what she loves. It's no surprise her store is a success—Laura comes from a family of downtown Oakville entrepreneurs. Her father owns Haircraft, her brother Paul owns Paul Anthony's Hair Salon, and her mother Shirley Jane owned the Shirley Jane Boutique for 35 years. "I got my start picking up pins off the floor and sorting buttons in our seamstress' room," laughs Laura. "It's funny, because I always said to my mom that I'm never going to get into this industry, that I don't like it—it didn't turn out that way." In fact, Laura's mother helped her open Mainstream and they became partners. Shirley Jane's influence on Laura has been significant—as a mother, business partner and fashion soul mate.

Tragically, Shirley Jane passed away two years ago of breast cancer. Laura is still struggling with the loss. "We pretty much spent 24/7 together," she says. "When she passed it was like losing a best friend. I thought I would never survive it when she was first diagnosed. I

actually bought a white minivan because I figured that I had enough room to sleep in it if I need to just take off." Even though the grief is still fresh, Laura remembers her mother as a



woman with a strong presence. "She was 5-foot red-headed ball of fire," she says. "When she walked into a room people noticed her." Laura describes Shirley Jane as a fun, fair and fashionable woman who brought strength to both her business and personal life—the kind of person Laura hopes she has become.

"I think my mom was a lot sexier than I was, though," she laughs. "When she was

in the hospital, the nurses would say that she was the best dressed lady in the hospital. She always looked good, even when she was sick."

Laura has found many creative ways to memorialize her mother. Outside Mainstream in Oakville, Laura has a bench donated by the Downtown Oakville BIA to her mother's memory, engraved with these words: "In memory of Shirley Jane Scarfo: We strive to walk in her footsteps." A plaque at the Burlington Mainstream store bears the same inscription. In addition, among her other fabulous accessories, Laura wears a heart around her neck with her mother's ashes. Perhaps her most important tribute to her mother is her fundraising work for breast cancer. For the past two years, Laura has held a fundraising fashion show and silent auction at Julia's restaurant.

A self-proclaimed workaholic, like her mother, Laura admits that she is working through the pain . . . literally. She opened a new Mainstream location in Burlington last year and every Wednesday trains dogs—a hobby that has kept her busy for ten years. "I think we can go one of two ways," she says. "You can either fall into the grieving and let it take over your life, or you can use that to push you forward." Looks like it's full steam ahead for Laura Scarfo.