

THE SISTAHOOD



Professor De Costa

Caroline de Costa is one tough cookie. While some would argue she's now part of the "establishment", Caroline has been fighting the good fight for most of her life. And she's not letting opponents dissuade her. Never has, never will. We all know her as a gynaecologist, obstetrician, author, professor and proponent of the abortion tablet RU486.

"I just believe decisions about pregnancy are a woman's choice, with her partner," Caroline simply explains. She also is a wife, has had seven children, is a grandmother and activist. Possibly one of her first overtly activist moments was as a 23 year old in 1971 Dublin. She was among a group of women who, by buying contraception in Belfast and returning to southern Ireland, helped bring about partial

legalisation of contraception across Ireland's south. In her first year of study at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, a young Caroline became a single mum. She later met her husband-to-be Alan at lectures and the pair married while at medical school.

Caroline describes her mother as a personal inspiration, as the special education teacher returned to university to study when Caroline was nine or 10. To young women starting out in life, Caroline says education is very important, as is experience of other parts of the world.

"You shouldn't try to be superhuman but it is possible to have a balanced life," she says.

To relax, Caroline enjoys swimming, music, being around family and she sheepishly admits to owning "a lot" of shoes, though not quite at the Imelda Marcos level.

BOLD, DYNAMIC AND STYLISH, THESE THREE WOMEN ARE INSPIRATIONAL. THEY HAVE ALL MADE STRONG NAMES FOR THEMSELVES IN THEIR CHOSEN CAREERS, THEY ARE FORGING THEIR OWN PATHS IN LIFE, THEIR FAMILIES ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF WHO THEY ARE AND, JUST LIKE MOST OF US, THEY STILL LOVE SHOPPING FOR SHOES.

WORDS ROBYN RANKIN PHOTOGRAPHY MARC MCCORMACK

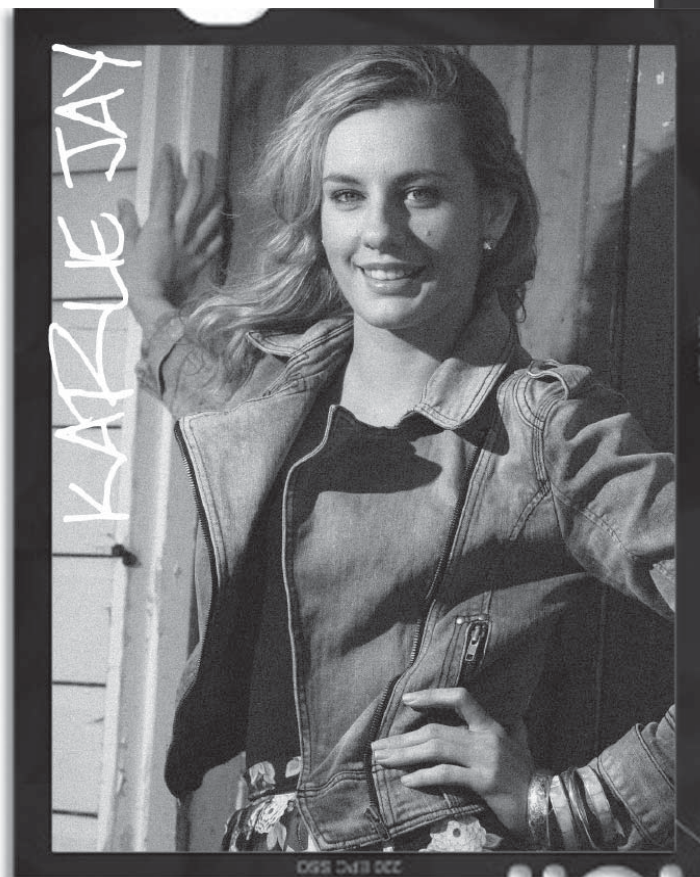
Karlie Jay Young, vibrant and sexy, Karlie Jay Perry-Virgin's star is definitely on the rise. The Mossman-based fashion designer's fluid, feminine visions are winning women over, all around the country. She has gained a reputation for her distinctive and original style, receiving national recognition as a finalist at the 2005 Australian Fashion Awards for her Couture Design, "fem de lar mer".

Although she did not start sewing until after she graduated from high school, Karlie Jay gained her industry, sewing and pattern-making skills through an intense course at Cairns TAFE. She is now looking forward to wholesaling her designs.

"I have always said I am not a follower of trends or people. There are so many amazing women that have done wonders for the Australian fashion industry and for our nation," the 24-year-old says.

"I know I wouldn't be able to do what I am doing without the help and support of my family and partner. I have always loved all creative fields, and growing up over the Daintree River as a child you have a lot of time on your hands to entertain yourself."

She urges young girls to follow their dreams and take risks necessary to get there. "But most importantly, be true to yourself and humble to others. Anything is possible, you just need to set your mind to it and work hard," she says with confidence.



Linda Cooper Linda Cooper is the first to admit her hectic work schedule sometimes gets in the way of the desires she has for her family life.

With that she has some guilt at not "being there" all the time for her boys.

This mother, wife, media personality and now councillor seems to have life under control. But get her in a room with no one else around for a couple of hours, and some of the walls come down.

As a young girl, she says she was "very aspirational but perhaps a bit delusional - I thought I was going to be a supermodel," she reveal. "I wish my family had told me at a younger age that was never going to be a possibility."

It may be one of the few challenges she hasn't conquered but that doesn't stop her taking on whatever comes her way.

Linda had her own radio show for four years before moving into publishing, buying *CityLife* magazine - which became a multimillion dollar company with publications in Cairns, Mackay and Townsville. Now she represents Redlynch, Brinsmead and parts of Whitfield on Cairns Regional Council.

She attributes her work ethic to strong family values but it comes at a price.

"I'm driven by guilt: trying to be a wife, a friend and a mother. Trying to balance it all is bloody tough. But I don't think my situation is very different to any other working mother in Cairns."

Despite this, if given the chance she would tell young women they could do whatever they wanted to do. "Don't let other people place restrictions on you."

Linda has a close network of

girlfriends who support each other in those inevitable times of need.

"They are my rocks. When I'm tired and struggling they'll sit me down, tell me to take a deep breath ... and then we'll start talking about shoes," she says.

As for her future and conjecture she may one day run for mayor, the answer is quite naturally politically correct.

"At this point in time, absolutely not. The reality is that the children will be in the final years of school in the next local government term," she says.

"However, I'd be dishonest if I said I hadn't thought about it. I don't know. Maybe. I've spoken to Val. She knows I've been approached. I've still got a lot to learn. This is my first term and it's an extremely complicated beast."

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