

International Women's Day

What you care about is the key to your true vocation

Text and photo

By Barbara Neyedly

International Women's day has a special significance for the Times Change Women's Employment Service, at 365 Bloor St. E.

Since its founding in 1974, the non profit agency has focused on setting women of all races and ethnic backgrounds on productive life paths, careers and employment.

And so it was fitting that their March 8 open house and celebration for International Women's Day featured an address by a woman whose life and work prove that "a hero lies within all of us."

Author Michelle Tocher discussed a "hero's journey" in her book, *Brave Work*. It offers guidance on ways to live a more purposeful life in today's workforce. And, for any woman who is thinking of making a major life transition, Tocher presents transformative insights and practical wisdom.

She began by pointing out the difference between a "mechanical world", in which individuals are mere "cogs in a wheel" and an "organic world defined by us where we

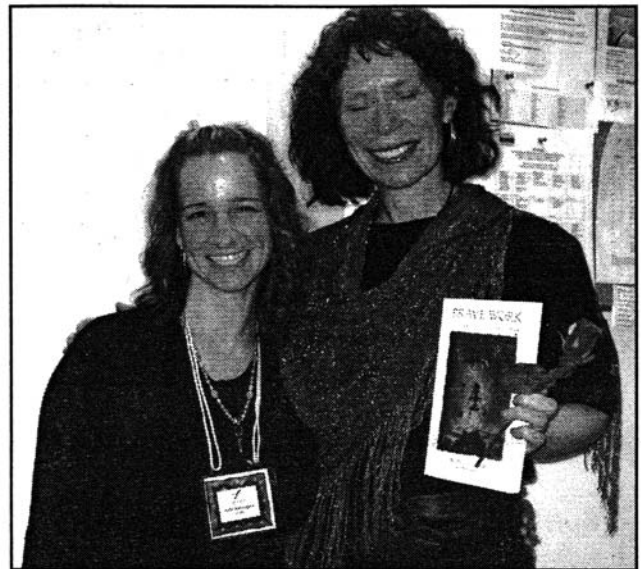
are on a journey".

Tocher's own journey began 10 years ago when her non profit communications company closed due to funding cuts. She had to lay off a staff of eight people. "I was devastated - it was my baby," she recalled. After which Tocher ended up flat on her back in complete collapse.

Painful efforts to "reinvent myself" and figure out what went wrong followed. But five years later she still didn't know and was on disability. "My identity also disappeared," she said. "There are a lot of people in nowhere," she noted. There is a big mountain, whose peak each individual has to struggle to ascend, she said. To do that one has to ask oneself, "What am I called to do and what do I care about?" Her answer came through fairy tales for adults, and suddenly she wanted to tell them.

Another epiphany occurred when one Christmas Tocher couldn't travel to British Columbia for a family holiday, so decided to send artwork instead.

"Suddenly my fingers were flying all over that day, as little people emerged." She fashioned elves, fairies and dwarfs with deformities - such as huge feet or noses.



THE HERO INSIDE: Each of us has one struggling to get out and during an International Women's Day celebration, March 8, at the Times Change Women's Employment Service, Michelle Tocher, right, described her own personal journey. Her emergence from total despair to become an author, storyteller and artist, is the subject of her new book, *Brave Work*. Julie Warrington, left is an intake/outreach worker at the centre.

So over the next 10 years Tocher became an expert storyteller, author and artist.

"In this world of work, there is no prescribed path, we make our own way," she told about a 45-woman audience. When we follow our own path, possibilities come, allies and resources appear. But we need courage to confront the status quo. Being true to our own heart and instincts also builds stamina to carry on, said Tocher.

We have to combat the traditional image of the working world that says working hard leads to promotion, security and more money, she said. Corporate mergers and downsizing can counteract that. Today's career path is uncharted territory, she said.

"*Brave Work* does not tell us how to get a job. Rather, it illustrates what the journey entails, puts us in touch with our own path and shows us the way to claim and bring forth what we find meaningful in the work we do," says Tocher, a master storyteller with a gift for enchantment. "*Brave Work* gives us our bearings, performing the age-old function of myth, to help us see from whence we came and whither we go."

Times Change provides free career and educational counselling, computer skills workshops and a comprehensive resource centre to women looking for a job, experiencing a career transition or new to the labor market. For more information, call 416-927-1900, or see: www.timeschange.org.

