

Real Power
Mississauga News, July 28, 1976
ROBINSON,
Irene

Irene Robinson: the lady won't give up

By TINA IVANY

The lady just won't give up. But then, when you believe in something as strongly as she does, the thought of throwing in the towel just never occurs.

The lady is Irene Robinson. The name is easy, but to pin an identity on her is not. For in her 46 years, she has known many identities.

The one for which she has become most known in Mississauga was as the Liberal candidate in the riding of Mississauga East in last September's Provincial election. In that election she failed to become Irene Robinson, MPP, by less than 1400 votes, conceding that identity to former Mississauga City Councillor Bud Gregory.

But it's a concession she hopes will be temporary. For once again, Robinson will carry the Liberal banner in that riding come the next Provincial election. So much for the old adage "once bitten, twice shy". Instead she'll grit her teeth and bite back.

WRONG GAL

Had someone told the mother of four boys, back when she was a student at Jarvis Collegiate, that in three decades' time she'd be running for political office, no doubt Robinson would have flashed her ready smile and told them they had the wrong person.

The daughter of a factory worker, Irene was not politically involved as a high school student. But she admits that the seeds for her political philosophy were planted at the time.

"When I was in high school, the Young Progressive Conservatives were just starting out. They were a very active group at Jarvis and I was exposed to their way of thinking.

"I guess that's when I decided that I wasn't a Tory. And as a factory worker, my dad was inclined towards the NDP, but I didn't feel comfortable there either."

As a result, she "fell into the Liberals", not as an active party worker but as someone who identified with "their way of thinking".

That identification was reinforced when she married Rod, now a Mississauga sales executive, who was also a Liberal. But she still did not become involved in the political process, other than casting her ballot on voting day.

The urge to participate was created by the defeat of Louis St. Laurent in the '57 election.

"I realized then," she says, "that if you wanted your party to stay, you had to get right in there and do something about it."

FEET WET

And so, Irene Robinson got her political feet wet during the next election campaign. She started small, handling one poll in North Bay where she was living at the time. But that move signaled the start of 17 years

of active involvement in working for the Liberal Party. That involvement has included working for a number of candidates as well as serving on committees at both the provincial and federal levels and also serving as executive director of the Ontario Federal Campaign Committee.

The involvement included some highlights. As an uncommitted delegate to the '68 Liberal leadership convention, her thinking and decision-making process was followed in detail by a Toronto paper in an attempt to describe to its readers how an uncommitted delegate makes a final decision.

Working as the riding secretary for Mississauga's Hylliard Chappell brought her into close contact with constituents, "a relationship on which I thrive", as well as an affinity for dealing with problems.

"It was a great learning experience. I discovered that I cannot leave something undone. If someone called me with a problem, and I couldn't answer it, I would find someone who could," she says.

THE DECISION

Ironic perhaps, but Irene had been very satisfied being a "kingmaker and not a king". Her goal, she says, had never been to run for office.

But then people change. Robinson was no exception. The impetus came when she was conducting interviews to find candidates. The question was often asked of her, "But why don't you run?"

"You know," she explains, "I never used to voice my opinion on issues. I'd experience a gut reaction to certain issues, but I'd never voice it."

"Then, after listening to other potential candidates voice their opinions, I began to realize that my own gut reaction was right on."

When that realization occurred time after time, the confidence she had been lacking to go it on her own became visible.

It was boosted by the encouragement of a number of people, including the five most important men in her life, Rod and the boys. When all around her demonstrated their belief in her ability, Irene Robinson began to believe in herself and she declared her intentions to run in Mississauga East.

It was a belief that carried her through a grueling campaign in the East last fall. And it was a belief that allowed her to declare on the very same night that she was defeated that she would run for nomination as Liberal candidate again.

DOWN-TO-EARTH

What kind of politics would she bring to Queen's Park?

"Practical, down-to-earth politics," she says, "there's got to be room for common sense. I could never pretend to know all the answers to all the

questions, but I'd make it my job to find out these answers."

Because of her make-up, Robinson says she would have to respond to questions, be they of a political nature or people problems as "a person", party lines notwithstanding.

"You know," she says, "during the last campaign, people would ask me what the party thought of such and such an issue. There were times when I said, 'Look, I'll find out what the party stand is but I'll also tell you what I think of the issue.'

"That type of dialogue is essential, and it should continue once an MPP is in office. Mainstreeting should not just happen during the campaign itself. If you don't talk to the guy on the street how are you going to know who it is you represent and what he's thinking?"

Out of interest, Robinson has often since '72 gone down to Queen's Park to sit in the House and listen to the unfolding of governmental affairs.

"It very much concerned me how the Conservatives were able to bulldoze through whatever it was they wanted. Their way was the only way," she says. "And this is why I don't feel so terrible about this present minority government because good government has to be a balance of power. The opposition now has some voice."

THEIR SUPPORT

To those critics who maintain her four sons may suffer should mother spend more time in the House rather than her own Streetsville area home, Myles, 23, Marc, 19, Todd, 15 and Scott, 12 will tell you differently. Their active involvement in the fall campaign stands as evidence of their approval. Todd and Scott in particular have been raised with a political awareness for mother was politically involved before the two boys were even a twinkle in Rod's eye.

"At age three," she says, "Scott may not have been able to recite all the nursery rhymes or all the ABCs, but he could sure tell you who the prime minister was."

Although a Provincial election has not yet been called, it could come at any time. When it does, Irene Robinson is ready.

The lady just won't give up.



While one son Scott, 12, cuts into his morning victuals, Irene Robinson serves yet another of her four sons Todd, 15, his breakfast. The Robinson family is already involved in planning Irene's campaign for the next Provincial election in which she'll run as the Liberal candidate in Mississauga East. Staff photo by Fred Loek.