

Lois Shapiro Canter

Her vision is better than 20/20
when it comes to seeing needs
of women and girls WorldWide

There was no mistaking which leader in the group assembled near the carousel in Congress Park was Lois Shapiro Canter. After an exchange of phone calls and emails, I'd invited Lois to be photographed by Donna Martin as part of a special section inside the Summer 2003 edition of *Saratoga Living*.

Each individual to be featured as part of a tribute to those who make things go round in and around Saratoga Springs had been encouraged to bring along a prop that would aid in a quest to help make each picture worthy of a thousand words.

To this end, Gavin Landry, then Executive Director of the Saratoga Tourism and Convention Bureau, showed up carrying a suitcase while Longfellow's Inn & Restaurant bartender Steve Montouri brought along an uncorked bottle of wine and a pair of wine glasses to be placed on a serving tray.

But not before he had tied a crisp white apron around his waist. Saratoga Sweets proprietor Michael Fitzgerald prompted squeals of laughter when he arrived costumed as The Peppermint Pig while then longtime Saratoga County Fair General Manager Dick Rowland hammed it up with the fair's colorful Scarecrow mascot.

In all, there were just over a dozen community representatives from diverse hops, skips, walks and jumps of life on the carousel that day.

But it was the message on the sign Lois proudly displayed for the camera that caught my eye and made my head spin with questions concerning the not-for-profit she had founded a year earlier. Beneath the logo for the Saratoga Foundation for Women WorldWide were the words: "Research, Education and Advocacy for Women Around the Globe."

But it's what this extraordinary soul has quietly accomplished since then that convinced me Lois is truly heaven-sent.

Fast forward a decade and you'll find Lois seated across from me in a trendy Internet cafe looking every bit as vibrant as she did on the carousel.



The Saratoga Foundation for Women WorldWide

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Devoted to  
research,  
education  
& advocacy



Lois Shapiro-Canter of the Saratoga Foundation for Women WorldWide as photographed by Donna Martin. The collage at bottom appeared inside of the Summer 2003 edition of *Saratoga Living* magazine. The in-depth feature included tributes penned by Ann Hauprich that honored Lois and others who were helping The Spa City go round all year round.

Lois was inspired by the teachings of Muhammad Yunus who professed that lending small amounts of money to poor women in underdeveloped nations was key to their independence from misery and want.

When I hear about the projects this mother of two daughters (both of whom were adopted from China) has tackled since we first met, I'm tempted to ask if a Wonder Woman cape is stashed in her briefcase.

Already a seasoned leader in economic, environmental and civil justice fields before she became President & CEO of SFWW, Lois is more determined than ever to make a positive difference at home and abroad in the fields of biotechnology, economic justice, environmental health and multicultural equity education.

A former senior legislative analyst, assistant district attorney, educator and statewide women's civil rights leader, Lois also continues to practice law in and around Saratoga County. Lobbying before the NYS State Legislature, forming not for profits and practicing her criminal, family law, personal injury and immigration law specialties.

Few who observe her powerful presence in area courtrooms would guess that Lois sometimes visits those residing in African huts with hardened dirt floors, sleeps beneath nets to avoid becoming infected by malaria-carrying mosquitoes and where she eats cabbage that has been steamed over open fires in order to kill typhoid germs.

But logging tens of thousands of miles only to endure harsh living conditions first-hand is all part of this dynamo's commitment to the innovative research, education and advocacy programs she oversees.

If that weren't impressive enough, Lois and husband Jay have assumed official sponsorship of a 17-year-old student named Mary from a remote part of Kenya. In addition to the \$75 monthly sponsorship that has ensured Mary a good education and hope for a better future, Lois has personally brought the girl such gifts as books on Impressionist paintings as well as art supplies that are not readily accessible in that part of Africa. The goal of broadening Mary's horizons has been achieved as her young eyes have been opened to the possibilities that will await her upon graduation from a private boarding school called Tetu Girls' Academy in May 2015.

Lois's laptop overflows not only with images of Mary and other smiling uniformed students but also of some of the "foster felines" Lois has provided for along the way – sometimes leaving behind extra money to ensure special four-legged friends do not go without food or veterinary care in her absence.

A firm believer in the importance of creating a world without poverty, illiteracy and abuse, Lois is adamant that micro-credit is one of the best ways of slowly but surely ridding the world of such injustices.

"I was inspired by the teachings of Muhammad Yunus who professed that lending small amounts of money to poor women in underdeveloped nations was key to their independence from misery and want," said Lois.

Carefully screening the micro-credit applicants to ensure the money will be used only to build their small businesses and to provide for their children's educational, nutritional and medical needs, Lois is encouraged by the positive results thus far.

"Common micro-credit initiatives have involved raising chicks for their eggs, raising goats for their milk, and making and selling soap or jewelry," explains Lois. "The women take their responsibilities to this program very seriously."

In order to ensure the program's continued success, no new women may be admitted to the program until the first ones have repaid their debts. "A bit of positive peer pressure can go a long way," beams Lois.

In order to ensure that teenager Alexandra, who was diagnosed with autism as a toddler, receives what Lois calls "the best specialized education possible", she now attends the New England Center for Children in Boston.

Samantha is now a high honor middle school student in Saratoga Springs. She also plays the violin and is learning to play the piano as well as studying five languages (Chinese, French, German, Italian and Spanish). This training will surely stand Sam in good stead should she ever opt to follow in her mother's footsteps.

Lois is also proud of the work of Saratoga Foundation for Women WorldWide Research Fellows. Among the nations where they reside or have resided are Asia, France, Germany, India, Italy, Pakistan, Spain and New Zealand. "Our Research Fellows have generated important research on issues, including micro credit finance, environmental health, economic justice and human rights," notes Lois.

Skidmore College students, meanwhile, have performed research on issues and taught in local schools and after school programs on environmental and health issues. Lois is grateful for the support of the Saratoga Foundation for Women's Board of Directors as well as for the grants and donations that have aided her humanitarian efforts.

Asked how she continues to seemingly "do the impossible well," Lois takes a deep breath. "The truth is I still need to learn to stop going before my body crashes. It's just so hard to take time out to rest when there's so much still to be done," muses Lois.

In the spirit of many hands making light work, I encourage those who are able to join Lois in her noble crusade to aid women in need at home and abroad to get started by visiting [www.saratogafoundation.org](http://www.saratogafoundation.org) or viewing recent stories and photos on Saratoga Foundation for Women WorldWide's Facebook.

In addition to interviewing women for loans, including Zipporah the tailor, visitors may read the amazing story of Margaret. Each worth a thousand words, photos reveal how Margaret looked in 2010 compared with a year after getting micro loan and in 2014. "With loan she bought a goat, sold the milk, got a larger home, bought four acres, sold the goat and sent daughter Julia through high school," explains Lois. "We gave her a second loan of \$350 to buy a water pump and piping to irrigate crops to sell at market. Hers is a true success story."

Something tells me the ride on the carousel of life is about to get a lot smoother for many females in Kenya, thanks to an upstate New York woman who is choosing to earn her wings the hard way!