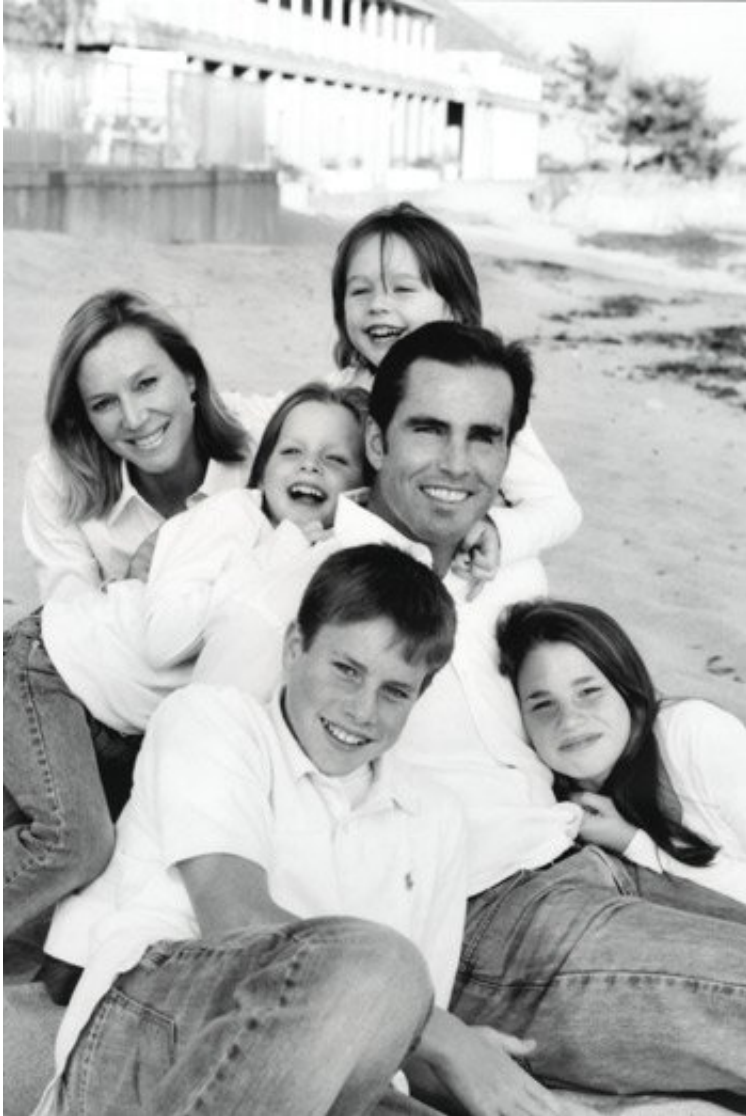


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The Queen of Multitasking

How Rye's Lee Woodruff successfully juggles career and crisis with her family and foundation.

BY: SUSAN HODARA



Picture a great many plates spinning in the air, one after another swirling gracefully through space, faster and faster, not one falling to the ground. Now picture the person below them, the one who's keeping them aloft. It would be no surprise to those who know her if that person were Lee Woodruff, the freelance writer, author of two books, foundation board member and spokesperson, and television personality who lives in Rye with her husband, ABC News reporter Bob Woodruff, and their four children.

"Lee has always liked to have all her plates circling in the air," says her younger sister Nan McLoughlin. "She's the queen of

multitasking. She's happiest that way."

Such indefatigable spirit not only has enabled Woodruff to balance life as a working mother and to handle her family's unexpected crises, but it has driven her to convert the insights and experience she's gained along the way into work that touches the lives of others. She has found numerous ways to make the personal universal.

Her latest initiative, launched in January, is Caregiver Cornerstones, a source of information and support services for those caring for others. That is a role she knows well.

In January 2006, Bob, then news anchor for ABC, suffered a traumatic brain injury when he was hit by a roadside bomb while on assignment covering the war in Iraq. Since then, he has recovered and is back on the air as a reporter at ABC. But not before spending months of painful treatments and rehabilitation, during which Lee was his primary caregiver.

"I was terrified because he seemed so fragile at first," she says. "I was constantly worried—about his pain, about how much he would recover, about what our lives might be like. Caregiver Cornerstones offers resources that people like me didn't have initially."

Caregiver Cornerstones is part of Partners Against Pain, a national resource sponsored by Purdue Pharma to advance pain-care standards. Wanting to raise awareness of the need for long-term pain management for veterans and returning troops, Woodruff joined forces with Partners Against Pain in 2008. She has been instrumental in furthering its focus on the military.

Woodruff says she is one of the "lucky ones" who has had the fortune of shedding her caregiver status. "I'm a 'past caregiver' now. But having come out the other side, in some ways, I serve as a beacon of hope, if that's not too cheesy a description."

Recognizing the importance of that beacon from the earliest days of her husband's recuperation, Woodruff put her considerable skills to work. Drawing from journals she kept during that time, she and her husband co-authored the bestselling *In an Instant: A Family's Journey of Love and Healing*, a memoir chronicling their ordeal that was published in February 2008. Both Lee and Bob continue to accept engagements across the country speaking publicly about their experience.

After the trauma, they established the Bob Woodruff Foundation and ReMIND.org, a national organization that provides resources to injured service members, veterans, and their families. Lee, who serves on the foundation's board of directors, reports that, to date, ReMIND.org has invested nearly \$6 million in public awareness, education, and national and community programs.

In addition to these efforts, Lee decided to write a second book. *Perfectly Imperfect: A Life in Progress*, published in 2009, is a collection of personal essays that reflect—with humor and intimacy—on being a mother, wife, daughter, and friend in contemporary times. For three years, she has been a lifestyle and family contributor to ABC News's Good Morning America, and she continues to work as a freelance writer for national magazines, including *Health*, *Redbook*, *Family Fun*, and *Country Living*. Add to that caring for her kids (Mack, 18; Cathryn, 16; and twins Nora and Claire, 10) and the family's two dogs, Woody and Tucker, and life can get complicated. "My days look different every single day," she says.

Lee grew up in Albany, the eldest of three daughters. Her mother was a homemaker; her father, a vice president at a textile company. Her parents live in Massachusetts now, her father suffering from dementia. "They were loving but strict, conservative, and fiscally tight," Woodruff says. "I have parts of all of these traits, but with a liberal twist."

As a child, she says, she loved making up stories and knew early on that she wanted to be a writer. In 1978, she left home for Colgate University, where she majored in English. Though she had no inkling at the time, her future husband arrived on campus the following year. "He was a year younger than I. He had a girlfriend the whole time, so he was never really on my radar."

After college, Woodruff moved to New York City and worked in public relations, writing press materials on everything from race

cars to union prevention. One evening, she spotted a familiar face in the now defunct Flutie's restaurant at the South Street Seaport. It was Bob, in New York as a summer law associate. "That night we laughed and laughed and talked and talked," she says. "It was instant attraction." They agreed to have dinner together a couple of weeks later, at a restaurant in the Village that she says they've recently tried unsuccessfully to locate again.

The couple married in 1988 and, three years later, Lee became a mother. She began working from home, forming her own freelance writing and public relations business. "I loved the flex time and being my own boss, but I did miss working in an office a little," she says. "Between assignments and the babies, it was a lot of juggling, but there's a part of me that thrives on that."

Her sister, Nan, considers the role of working mother one of the most challenging for Lee. "There is still a segment of the population that questions how she can run a foundation, write books, go on book tours, and still mother four children," she says. "But I've watched that dance of hers for years, and I think she does an amazing job."

Before moving to Rye, the couple relocated frequently as Bob followed assignments around the world. "In order of appearance in our married lives," says Lee, "we've lived in New York City; Beijing; San Francisco; Redding, California; Richmond, Virginia; Chicago; Washington, D.C.; London for two years; and Rye." In many ways, it was an adventure, and, at first, the Woodruffs' children were young enough that changing schools was not a problem. But after a while, Lee says, "I ran out of gas. When Mack got to sixth grade, Bob told us it was enough, and we agreed. We were ready to put down roots."

Those roots ended up in Rye, where the Woodruffs settled in 2002. "Westchester is the place we've lived the longest," she says, "and we are happy to hang our hats here."

The Woodruffs have strong reasons for feeling connected to the area. "When you go through a trauma like we did, your priorities get reorganized and you understand the things that really matter," Lee says. "Family and friends become much more important. Our community here in Rye was incredible."

During the course of Bob's recovery, neighbors prepared meals for the family, lined up play dates for Nora and Claire, and arranged rides for Mack and Carolyn to sports practice and other events. "One neighbor cleaned out our garage, and another paid to get our lawn mulched and edged," she says.

McLoughlin knows that it wasn't easy for her sister to accept this assistance. "It was hard for her to ask for help," she says. "She's not used to that role. You couldn't even get her to take a nap. I'd tell her that things would still be there when she woke up, but then I'd catch her on her laptop."

The responses of others touched Woodruff. "People really pulled together for us, even people we didn't know," she says. "It reminds you why you choose to live in a place like this."

Bob's injury also introduced Lee to the many resources available in the County. "You delve into a world you never knew existed, that you never thought about when things were going well," she says. "Quickly you learn where the rehab places are, which therapists can come to your house, and what support there is."

This spring, the Woodruffs moved again, but this time they stayed in Rye, where they recently completed construction of a smaller contemporary with geothermal and solar power. "We're downsizing a little," Lee says. "We're very proud that our new house is green."

Their inspiration to build arose after Bob anchored a show on environmental conservation. "He wanted to walk the walk," she says, "to try and live more off the grid with a smaller carbon footprint." She adds that Bob had a longstanding desire to build a home to his own specifications. As for Lee, "I could live in a yurt," she says.

Although it's not a yurt, the Woodruffs own a second home in the Adirondacks, a cottage that's been in Lee's family for three generations; Lee's parents and sisters own cottages nearby. "Picture the Kennedy complex, but on a Dirty Dancing scale," she

says. "We each have our own cottages and there's a collective family beach. It's a place where we spend lots of time together. It's wonderful, minimalist, old-fashioned, with the cousins growing up together. We go there in the summers and any weekend we can get away, which isn't easy when you have kids playing soccer and whatnot."

According to McLoughlin, summers in the Adirondacks are key to her sister's ability to maintain her various responsibilities. "She takes every summer off," McLoughlin says. "When the kids are home twenty-four seven, she's up at Lake George, absolutely away from the orbit."

And away from her professional personas. To McLoughlin, the sisters are like "a Peter Pan family in Neverland. We're pretty juvenile in our humor and the things that we do. I'm always taken aback when I see Lee in a serious role. I get a tickle out of it."

Here in Rye, the Woodruff family gathers at home for dinner at least three times a week. "It's tough with Bob's schedule," Lee says. "It may not be a long, relaxing dinner, but we're all around the table, no cellphones allowed."

When they're not dining in, the family enjoys restaurants not far from home: Water Moon in Rye and several in Port Chester, including Q Restaurant & Bar and Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich's Tarry Lodge. "My favorite, favorite coffee shop is Patisserie Salzburg of Rye," Lee says. "It is probably responsible for everything that's hanging off my hips right now!"

Which is likely a bit of exaggeration. Lee is often out walking with her dogs, either along the beach near her home or on the horse trails in Bedford, where McLoughlin lives. "I love going there with the dogs," she says. On other days, she goes to the Edith G. Read Natural Park and Wildlife Sanctuary in Rye, where dogs aren't allowed.

For more exercise, Lee takes "Yoga with Gwen" classes at the Community Synagogue of Rye and swims at the Rye YMCA, where she is a member. "I try to do something physical almost every day," she says.

She celebrated her 50th birthday in May. "I'm embracing it. I got my AARP card and I'm carrying it proudly. After all, who doesn't like a discount?"

Lee moves forward from here stronger for what she has lived through. "Like any big event in life, I suppose, you gain things and you lose things and you are reminded about what matters," she says. "You are also tested and you learn things about yourself that are hopefully reassuring once you come through it all. You don't do everything well every day, that's for sure. One thing I always say to people now: 'There are a lot more dishes in my sink than there would have been before.' And I'm just fine with that."

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