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# FASHION



## THE ONES

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# LEAD THE WAY

The origin story of Carol's Daughter is a common one within the beauty industry: The brand started in its founder's kitchen. But what began as a few DIY body butters sold at Lisa Price's church market (thanks to the encouragement of her mother, Carol) has become one of the hair-care industry's biggest success stories. In fact, the brand went on to become one of the first Black-owned product lines to have a flagship store and was even featured in the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. This year, Carol's Daughter, which recently landed in Canada, turns 30 and remains a staple for anyone with textured hair. But that was never the plan. "I just wanted to make a connection with people and help them understand how to take care of their hair," says Price. "I never wanted people to feel like my hand was in their pocket."

As a Black woman coming of age in the '70s and '80s, Price says she was lucky to have grown up learning about hair health and hearing the women in her family speak fondly about their own hair, giving her permission to do the same. "My mother, aunts and grandmother did not talk about hair in a negative

As Carol's Daughter turns 30, founder Lisa Price reflects on the lessons she's learned at the helm of one of natural hair care's leading brands.

By SOUZAN MICHAEL GALWAY

way," says Price. "I didn't grow up thinking 'The straighter my hair, the better I am.' Thank God." Price says her mother (the inspiration behind the brand's name) "didn't like anything that made you look like someone you weren't."

This strong sense of self allowed Price to stay focused through the early stages of launching Carol's Daughter. The brand's rise to success was somewhat of a slow burn; it launched in 1993 and steadily gained traction in the industry. But Price says it wasn't until 2001—eight years into the business—that she was financially stable enough to take out a loan. And even then, she was prevented from doing so at her neighbourhood bank—a decision she feels was racially motivated. "There was a question about whether or not the money I'd be bringing in would be legitimate," she says. "I had to prove I wasn't a criminal." Today, Price says there's still much work to be done, but she's thrilled to see more representation and Black brand founders in the industry. "At least now, retailers are aware that there should be more diversity," she says. "Before, it wasn't even a conversation. You just figured stuff out on your own because you knew somebody was gonna say no to you."

From left: Carol's Daughter Goddess Strength Shampoo (\$15), Goddess Strength Hair & Scalp Oil (\$17) and Goddess Strength Leave-in Cream (\$17)



The turning point for Carol's Daughter came in 2002, when Price appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, giving the brand a major boost (often referred to as "The Oprah Effect"). From there, the direct-to-consumer brand launched on HSN and then several years later in Target. In 2014, Carol's Daughter was acquired by L'Oréal USA. Price stayed on as founder, overseeing product development, brand vision, education and more (a role she still holds today). While this milestone was a massive accomplishment for her and for the brand, she expected it would be received with slight pushback from consumers. "I anticipated concern," she says. "I anticipated comments like 'I hope the formulas don't change.'" So she recorded a personal video announcement, explaining that the acquisition meant Carol's Daughter would be in more stores and thus become even more accessible to customers. Unfortunately, the message went largely unheard. Instead, she was called a sellout; customers were angry that their beloved products were no longer going to be produced by a Black-owned brand. "I was surprised at how negative and visceral the reaction was," says Price.

With time, she came to understand her customers' frustrations. "I had to step back from the situation and look at it through the lens of the consumer," she explains. "I realized it wasn't about me. It was about our history. When we, as Black people, have trusted others with our things, they have stolen from us. I learned that my role is to mentor other entrepreneurs and cheer them on so this gets easier each time one of us does it." Price's ability to not only keep her cool in stressful situations but also lead the way as a pioneer in the industry has been instrumental in the decades-long success of Carol's Daughter. However, her role as a leader didn't come naturally to her. "I needed to sit at the head of the table, although it was uncomfortable and it wasn't where an introvert wanted to sit," she says. "But I had to learn how to lead—even if I didn't know exactly where I was going." ■

## CELEB SUPPORTERS

Carol's Daughter has an extensive roster of A-list fans. Lisa Price reflects on these pivotal meetings years ago.



JAY-Z

"I met him in 2003; I always called him Mr. Carter, and he called me Mrs. Price. I'm not sure why. It's just a thing we did. He was a fan of our now discontinued Ocean body-care line."



CASSIE

"She was part of a campaign we shot in 2011. What was revolutionary about Cassie's ad was that she had recently shaved one side of her head. That was not a thing back then and certainly not in a hair campaign featuring a beautiful head of hair. I loved that about her."



HALLE BERRY

"During the taping of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 2002, Oprah mentioned that she'd been gifted with Carol's Daughter products by Halle Berry. I had no idea Halle knew about the brand, so I later sent her a gift basket as a thank you, and she sent me a thank-you note back. That made me melt!"



OPRAH

"During that episode, Oprah said our foot cream was fantastic. At the time, we had a lotion and a foot butter. We didn't know which one she meant so we put both on our website's home page. After the episode, we sold a ton of foot products."



JADA PINKETT SMITH AND WILL SMITH

"Jada was into self-care before that term was a thing. She and Will eventually became investors, but they had been using Carol's Daughter products long before that. Years before we met, Will's assistant actually called me once to ask about new launches and I heard Will's voice in the background. I almost passed out."



MARY J. BLIGE

"Mary was a fan of our Almond Cookie Shea Soufflé. We worked together for a few years, creating and selling her fragrances. She also became an investor in 2006."

PHOTOGRAPHY: MAIN COURTESY OF CAROL'S DAUGHTER; CELEBRITIES VIA GETTY.