

Business woman of the year - from the tills

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25 May 2009 By Andy Sykes

From scanning cucumbers in Asda to sharing a stage with Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall, Veera Johnson's meteoric rise shows no sign of abating. Being crowned Business Woman of the Year at the Asian Women of Achievement Awards - an honour given to her by Dragon's Den star James Caan - is a far cry from her upbringing in Ribbleton when the seeds of her glittering career were first sown.

Veera, now 43, was the eldest of three children who lived with their parents on Ribbleton Avenue, close to the family corner shop business.

Inquisitive like most young girls, she watched her dad put in the hours. She didn't know it then, but it was a lesson she would never forget.

She went to Ribbleton Avenue Infant and Junior School and later Northlands High in Deepdale.

"It was very happy, I loved Preston. I have so many fond memories of the place, " she recalls.

"My abiding memory from growing up was the generosity and spirit of people there. They just got on with things no matter what."

Her career path took a slight detour and she ended up behind a counter in the old Asda store, off New Hall Lane.

She enjoyed the gossip and banter of the check-out crew but began working as a researcher in the careers service at County Hall.

It was a chance conversation that would set her off on a long and unstoppable rise.

She studied for an Open University degree before landing a job in economic development at Blackpool Council.

Her career was starting to flourish and she moved to Bexley Council in London.

A series of consultancy jobs followed before she was made Chief Executive Officer at ProcServe, which helps other firms trade electronically and across the Internet and has key contracts with the Treasury.

She said: "The Asian community in Preston has a very, very strong work ethic. I have always remembered that."