

NAWIC Scholarship Application – TAFE, by Michelle Judge

Enrolled in CPP50911 – Diploma in Building Design

At a young age I was inspired to create, draw, build with blocks, and design villages in my father's garden beds, with texture drawn on rocks for doors and windows. I'd play for hours with my brother, my imagination running wild and dreaming of my future home, paved driveway, lavish window dressings, a swimming pool and more. What can I say? With a family history of bricklayers, plumbers and engineers, it was in my blood.

I tried my hand at other occupations, but nothing sat well with me. I was bored being a receptionist/secretary/accounts clerk. I needed challenges in my life that wasn't just of general nature.

A year after begging for a job at nineteen with my father's mechanical engineering company, an opportunity came for me to undertake an apprenticeship in mechanical engineering drafting. Like a duck to water, I excelled. I completed my studies with distinction and a first and highest pass at the Sydney Institute of TAFE. This was followed with a nomination for apprentice of the year in 1998.

I thoroughly enjoyed drafting. During my time of study, the course covered all areas in building and construction, including, electrical drafting, mechanical, ducting and refrigeration, civil, surveying and among others my favourite architectural drafting. I even learned to weld.

My work career continued to advance and over time I was estimating, designing and running projects. I worked hard. I even studied Mechanical Engineering for a year. Unfortunately I did not complete this course due to having a baby, still working full time and later on a marriage breakup.

As a young female in a male dominated industry I did have my battles to fight and prove with other work colleagues and clients that I was just as worthy as the opposite sex to be in my position. I found the older men less willing to accept me, while the younger ones more intimidated.

Very strong minded and driven to succeed, I would not let this stop me. I felt anything a man could do, I could do equal, if not better.

In 2006 in an attempt to recuperate losses on property I decided to become an owner builder, putting my short experience in architectural drafting to use and my project management skills.

I did the owner builder course, designed and drafted up house plans, lodged them with council and built a house. All still while working full time and now a mother of three daughters. I loved it.

It was in 2009, after my second marriage breakup due to domestic violence, I would study at night to get my certificate in building and construction. With supportive parents and a newly developed love for building, I used dedication and commitment to see myself graduate from TAFE in 2012.

This was also great for my work career in commercial building. By now I was being more accepted on job sites by higher personnel, but still struggled with some of the tradesman.

I moved to Queensland, in December 2015. My parents moved too, buying a block of land. I drafted up their house plans and project managed the construction, with my mother undertaking the owner builder's course. She would not have done it this way if it wasn't for my previous experience.

After seeing what happiness I could bring to others, I decided to start my own business drafting houses. When I investigated what I would need, I discovered unlike NSW I would need a drafters license. To get that I needed further study, hence my enrollment in Brisbane TAFE once more to get my diploma in building design. I still have a long way to go before I can unleash my inner desires to be a building designer and builder, but I have the willpower to see it through.

And whilst many may ask, why all the effort when I could go and work for someone else doing what I am already qualified to do? I respond with because I want to make my mark on this planet and be proud of what I can achieve. I want to teach my girls that no one or thing can stand in their way. That it doesn't matter if you are female or male or how old you get, you are never too old to go after your dreams.

I may be a woman in a male dominated industry, I have to start early, finish late and work on weekends. I still have all the duties of not only a mother but a father too as I am a single mum. I work twice as hard, contract working and studying around caring for my daughters. I keep motivated every day to provide a better future for them.

Just the other week, my 13 year old girl, unboxed her new guinea pig cage and put it together by herself. She even used an electric drill which she had been taught to use at school. Her inspiration was me.

To embrace more women in the building industry, Government educational bodies should be targeting girls at a young age. When I was in high school and applied for engineering science, I was discouraged because I hadn't gained experience in technical drawing during my junior years, so I chose home economics instead. How I'd love the opportunity to go back to those teachers from 1989 and show them what I have achieved.

If I was to encourage young woman of today, I would start with promotional videos in year 7 and 8 before their electives were chosen. Have women like myself, visit schools on career days and share with them their experiences. Having a woman in a hard hat on a 30 second telecommercial is not enough. They too need to be inspired.

I think building is just not only for men. Woman also can be builders, building designers and project managers too. Isn't everything is better with a woman's touch?