CHRISTINE HEALEY

14. THE 20/20 PROJECT

PRELUDE

In this chapter I describe how growing up in a family who had traditional role expectations for women has challenged how I have taken up varying career options to continue to develop myself. The skills learned in previous roles have put me in good stead for my current role as a museum education. With the security of ongoing employment and the desire to become better at this job, I enrolled into Ph.D. research. In this chapter I discuss the challenges and joy I have discovered on my alternate flight towards a career in museum education that brings my life personal fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment. The year 2020 represents the completion of my current education goals and my desire for 20/20 vision that will extinguish my inner voice expressing doubts about my capabilities juxtaposed against supporting my broader career choices in my role as a leader in the field of museum education.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes my experiences as I attempt to forge a successful professional life for myself and formal education has become the pathway to achieving this. I admired my primary and secondary teachers for being interesting, intelligent, well-travelled and articulate adults. They were the only adults I knew who had been to university and I hoped that one day I would too and dreamt of becoming a teacher. My father had stopped attending school in Grade 2, to eventually become an owner-operator crane driver. My mother left in Form 8 to become a proofreader, stopping to have me when she was eighteen, later working in retail. My experience was light years away from what my family knew and as such the support they were able to offer as I went through these life-changing experiences was limited. I grew up in a traditional Australian family environment with a limited outlook for girls’ careers and my self-worth hinged upon my ability to be a good daughter and receiving my parent approval. There was an underlying expectation my future success would be based upon the security a husband could provide and I in turn would play the role of dutiful wife and mother. While my education was important, in that you should behave at school and do your best, subjects I didn’t do well in, such as math and science were explained away that “we can’t be good at everything”. My best subject was art and I was released from having to exert more effort in subjects I would never naturally be any good at. I felt frustrated that

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my future outlook was set so low and I wasn’t encouraged to fly higher to achieve higher or different life goals. Although I was well behaved I didn’t apply myself to my High School Certificate studies. I was 16, lonely and my parents argued a lot. I invested all my energy into my art folio, which I did very well at in the final examinations. I passed art and English, but failed Biology, Politics and Australian History so I couldn’t attend university. After a period of unemployment while I was seeking a job as a graphic artist or sign writer, I eventually started working at a retail outlet and moved through a series of jobs that I felt ashamed of. Late night shopping had just started and working in retail meant long hours on your feet. I followed my familial expectations to the letter, my way out of the family home was by marrying at 21 and I immediately started trying for a family. Marriage was difficult and compromise didn’t come easily to either of us. By the time I was 31 I was divorced, with three daughters and faced with the sobering realisation I would have to support myself. As disappointing and difficult as those times were, going through a very challenging separation and divorce, it was also a second chance to point my life in the direction I really wanted.

I was a stay-at-home mum before my three children started school, it was vital to me to be the best mother possible. I tried a range of craft classes and soon realised I could establish a home studio teaching craft myself. I won prizes at the Royal Melbourne Show and had my work featured twice in the Herald Sun. I enjoyed the challenge of teaching new skills that I saw enhanced the quality of my students’ lives as a social element increased their enjoyment. I loved teaching and was reminded of my long-held ambition to be a schoolteacher. When my children were all attending school I saw my chance to enroll at university. As a mature age student with no previous tertiary experience was offered a diploma pathway into higher education. I was very frightened of going back to school. Would I be accepted by the other students and lecturers? My largest fear was that it would confirm my high school failure and self-belief that I was stupid. I was however; reassured by people I was starting to meet who had been to university. Maybe I could do it.

Indeed I could. I loved studying. It opened up new ideas, peoples and opportunities. On completion of the diploma, I enrolled directly into a visual arts bachelor degree. I enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of tutorials so much, I enrolled in a concurrent diploma in cultural studies. My fear of writing diminished and I found it easier to write about what was going on in my mind than to make art about it. I still wanted to be a teacher and enrolled in the graduate diploma of education. Years of teaching painting in the community were consolidated and my confidence grew. This was my destiny. I was pleased to be setting a good example to my daughters and felt proud of them, two were attending university themselves.

It was very disappointing not to secure ongoing employment as an art teacher so I completed further studies to qualify as an English teacher. To further improve my qualifications and capacity as a teacher I enrolled in a Masters course in arts administration. Insecure work and periods of being on unemployment benefits was very upsetting and I started to regret not studying courses that had better vocational