

KFA Multimedia Art Contest

Julie Merkl

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My name is Julie Merkl and I have been an employee at KPU for the past 25 years, but a KPU student for even longer.....

As a child I was naturally inquisitive, fascinated with observing, listening and as a result, learning from others. Initially, nature was my teacher. As a family growing up in Surrey in the 1970's, we were surrounded by acres of untouched forest. Imaginative outdoor play was the normal, rain or shine. My parents felt that watching TV was not conducive to children's creative development, and so, for the first 13 years of my life we resorted to entertaining ourselves. Loaded up with my Dad's tools and whatever scraps of wood I could find in the yard, I would set to work building forts or transforming the vegetable garden into a dirt city, complete with rivers thanks to the garden hose. The summer's endless days were filled with climbing trees, planting gardens, painting rocks, making paper dolls or settling in for the night to sleep under the stars with nothing other than our sleeping bags. I believe it was during these years when my passion for learning began.

As I grew older, my learning transitioned from informal to formal, and upon high school graduation I completed a diploma in KPU's Fashion Design program. A week after graduation I landed a position as assistant designer at Westbeach Snowboarding, Chip Wilson's first company. It was my dream job. I was intrigued by Chip's innovative business sense and creative ideas but after two years decided to venture out on my own. This was the beginning of several small businesses I would start over the years, the largest of which was my own line of clothing manufactured in Macau, and sold to various stores throughout BC and Alberta.

Soon after my marriage, my focus again began to shift. The clock was ticking and the fast paced fashion industry was not ideal for raising a family. I had been working part time at KPU while running my company and the lure of working a set week (no weekends!) with vacation and benefits seemed ideal. Over the next 6 years we celebrated the births of our three children. Life was busy, working full time at KPU and raising three energetic boys. Often I would compare myself to the circus lady spinning plates on poles – trying to keep everything in balance. As with most parents, there were times when things seem to be spinning out of control and the thought of waving that white flag seemed imminent. But each day brought something new and despite the chaos, I wholeheartedly embraced being a mom. The nurturing, motivating and empowering allowed me a new role. I was the teacher, the mentor and couldn't imagine a better life.

As the kids grew older and more independent, my parenting schedule eased up and I found myself once again, yearning for that creative outlet. Throughout my parenting years I had slowly continued taking courses at KPU, and before I knew it I had completed 120 credits. Up to this point it had never been my goal to complete a degree. Education wasn't an obligation –for me, it was purely the enjoyment of learning. It was self fulfilling, empowering.... and addicting. Whether it was learning bee keeping from my father in law, or struggling through an upper level astronomy course after the sudden death of my mother, education both informal and formal, has transitioned me through many phases in my life.

This year, I celebrated my 50th birthday. If age has taught me anything it's that you never know what will come next. They say this "third age" offers the richest opportunity for finding fulfillment. Our perception of uncertainty in life is reduced and it's a "take stock" phase. This year I have committed to completing my Bachelor of Fine Art. I should graduate in 2020. I'm not out to impress anyone except myself. I figure why not follow my passion? Who knows what it may lead to – perhaps something better than I could imagine possible? Education gives you the opportunity to change and transform your life, to reinvent yourself....and for me, it goes far beyond academic goals.