

“ WHAT: Maryanne Kelly speech to the Lunch Box List “Resourceful Women” session

WHERE: Parmelia Hilton Hotel, Perth

WHEN: Wednesday 10 November 2010

TIME: ??

THE EARLY YEARS.....

I can summarise my first thirty years for you by misquoting Paul Kelly:

“Never got married early, always had no money, then when I got laid off _ really hit the skids!”

I left school early finished year 11 and then repeated it, as I was too shy to do public speaking in year 12. Got great marks, got bored and walked out the gate one day never to return. So I never finished school!

I was brought up in a small country town in Victoria, where getting a job was the goal, if you got a job as a bank teller you had made it. I got my first real job as a newsagent assistant and thought that was pretty special. I was brought up by a loving family with great morals and ethics which has set me up for life on understanding values, and am very grateful to my family for this.

I spent the early part of my working life doing anything I could make a living out of including picking fruit, running a piggery, kitchen hand, bar maid, managing pubs, motels, restaurants mostly in Victoria. I got pregnant with my daughter to a man who became very violent and threatening and part of my escape and dream was to see WA. When Compass was offering cheap flights, thought it was my only chance and well....never really went back.

My early career was interesting, started as a kitchen hand and then became the hotel manager, started as the piggery hand and became the piggery manager – didn’t really understand this and was somewhat embarrassed at times but now looking back this may have been a natural rise to leadership.

THE CATALYST FOR CHANGE.....

At 28 I was working in a bar and was a single mother with a small child. That’s when I knew that picking up odd jobs was not going to allow me to be the mother I wanted to be, and spend the time need with my daughter. I knew I had to create something for my daughter.

A barmaid I worked with one day told me she was studying to be a teacher. Being an inquisitive person I thought I should look into this “university thing” and started to explore exactly what it was all about. The most important thing was to find something which didn’t involve working nights because, as a single mother with no family support in WA, there were no babysitters on call.

OPENING THE DOOR TO STUDY....

It seemed unbelievable to me that I could even consider the possibility of becoming qualified at anything, my first interest was naturopathy but you didn't get HECS for that. I went to some career counselling and tested and came out with accountancy as the best degree for me. I couldn't believe it I got 51% at high school – just passed. Later down the track I learnt it is sometimes how you are taught.

I started to learn more about uni, did a course to assist with the mature age entrance exam. Didn't have a phone at the time so when I did get accepted to uni, the message was written on a scrap bit of paper at the pub I was working at – luckily I found it, and rang the uni back before just before they gave my spot away.

At uni I discovered I had a thirst for learning and I enjoyed it so much that I just kept studying. I found a great person to help look after Sarah my daughter, I cleaned houses and worked nights at the bar to stay afloat. There were a couple of mature age students in my group but no one was also working full time, and I was often asked how do you do it? When you don't have an option and you want an outcome you find a way.

While still studying for my Commerce degree I got my first taste of mining in the Goldfields as (I think) probably one of the oldest vacation students ever! I went to a place called Leinster which I had never heard of, I stayed in a camp with about 200 men and three women, my daughter had to go to Victoria and stay with my parents, this was the toughest part for me – separation for three months from my child.

A NEW CAREER PATH.....

Then, at the age of 31, I scored a job as an Admin Assistant at Leinster and continued my degree externally. They hadn't had any single parents before and didn't quite know how to house me, luckily another single parent started at the same time, so they thought lets put them together. This led to some interesting times.

I will never forget when I achieved my first degree. I was living with this fella and the envelope turned up so I decided to ignore it for a week. He eventually made me open it.....nerously I opened it and saw these words which said "CONGRATULATIONS" I couldn't believe it I cried for over 7 hours – my friends turned up to congratulate me it was so the most unbelievable achievement of my life – a moment I will never forget.

I completed a Bachelor of Commerce, then became a CPA, and completed an MBA, I then went on to obtain a Quarry Manager's ticket and a proficiency in Japanese Language and Indonesian Studies.

Between 31 and 38 I took every opportunity that came my way, Sarah and I moved between WA, NT and Victoria learning, absorbing and appreciating all that came our way. I had positions of accounts clerk, payroll clerk, capital accountant, financial accountant, financial analyst, business planning analyst. I had some fantastic exposure and met some fantastic people.

At 39 I was appointed the operations manager of the – at the time- the largest iron ore mine in Australia. In less than ten years I had gone from pouring beers to managing a \$100 million iron ore mine with the responsibility for a workforce of over 300 people.

My current position is as the General Manager, Production at Argyle, one of the largest diamond mines in the world. I am responsible for the everyday safety of a 400 strong workforce and for the consistent production of some of the rarest atoms on earth.

HOW DID I GET HERE....

During my career in the mining industry, I've been presented with the WA Business News 40/40 award and a Telstra Business Women Award – WA Hudson Corporate Sector. These awards came as a great shock and delight to me and forced me to sit down and reflect on "How did this all happen?" It is somewhat sombering to stop and reflect and something I realised I hadn't really done enough of. I think they should teach "stop and smell the roses 101"

My personal life hasn't been easy; I brought my daughter up on my own, have had no family support in WA and lost a partner to suicide four years ago. There has been continuous tension between work, home, study and family and sometimes I didn't get it right. Working in mining has a strong male focus and sometimes it is hard to be heard and often have queried myself on whether or not I deserve the opportunities I have been given.

Failure was never an option, there were people waiting for me to fall over, people who told me this is the biggest mistake this company has ever made, but that only meant that succeeding was my only response. I learnt it's important to listen and believe in yourself.

My daughter was a great motivator – she drove an inner motivation and found me a strength and resilience I never knew I had. She threw the "choice to fail" out the window. I always said I wanted to be able to buy her Levi jeans whenever she wanted them – she now tells me they are out of fashion. – maybe I should stop wearing them!

I grew up in the country riding horses and my dad always taught me if you fall off get straight back on the horse and ride. Well one day I rode under a branch it hit my forehead and knocked me off backwards. I got back on the horse straight away only to be knocked backwards off again the same way. After repeating this for a third time my dad said "okay how about we cut the branch off". My message in this is that it is okay to make mistakes, but learn from them quickly or they can hurt too much.

I am so grateful for my opportunities and learnings and for the people who have been a part of my adventure.

THE LEARNINGS.....

In the mining industry, as part of every investigation into why a particular event occurred, we document the learnings.

If I could offer up the learnings on what I think that has worked for me I would say:

- Even if the hill seems too high for you – don't let opportunities go by, grab them and enjoy the ride, listen and learn
- Believe in who you are and have confidence in yourself
- Look after yourself – whatever that means to you
- Maintain your values
- Always play the ball and stick to the game
- and do your best in everything you do.

And no matter what my final rule is to.....laugh out loud every day! This is the most powerful tool I have.

These journeys don't just happen to special people, we are all special and it can happen for you also.

Thank you