

'The only thing that's holding you back is yourself'

Grace Kennedy
North Delta Reporter

A ponytail beneath a hockey helmet was a target on your back.

That's what Chelsea Barron remembers from her years as a hockey player with the North Delta Minor Hockey Association. The North Delta woman grew up playing defence on the local boys team, liking the physicality of the game and the competitiveness of the team.

"For the most part I was accepted, but there were definitely challenges," she said, remembering when she started playing at age seven. "I would kind of have to prove ... that I was capable of playing with them and keeping up with them."

The opposing teams would come straight for her, testing her mettle as a hockey player rather than letting her get off easy.

But, she said, "it's kind of what developed me into the person I am today." That's a good thing, since Barron was one of only three women who appren-

ticed as machinists in British Columbia after she graduated from Burnsvie Secondary in 2012.

According to numbers from Statistics Canada, Barron is among the minority in all major trades. In 2016, when Barron was finishing her apprenticeship, there were only 525 female apprentices in all trades across Canada. Only 33 women across the country were being trained as machinists — a specialty trade that requires precision to create or modify unique parts.

For Barron, deciding to embark on a career as a machinist wasn't difficult. She knew she enjoyed working with her hands, having spent hours of her childhood helping her father around the house. She knew she could manage herself in a male-dominated environment, having embraced her years in the boys' hockey league.

"Some people feel like they can't do certain things, or they feel uncomfortable going into that kind of industry," Barron, 24, explained. "But really, the only thing that's holding you back is yourself."

She registered as an apprentice, working non-stop through four years of in-class education and 6,600 hours of on-the-job training to earn her Red Seal on Halloween last year. Now, Barron is a journeyman machinist working for Raute Canada, a Delta-based company that provides machinery to manufacturing companies in the forestry industry.

There, Barron is responsible for operating lathes, milling machines, drill presses and CNC machinery to create or fix parts for the company's equipment. It's an opportunity to be creative, which she loves, and a chance to continue to learn.

"That's one of my favourite things about the job," she said. "The creativity and the variety of work I get to do."

"You take a lot of pride in your work," she added. "Once you become really good at it, it feels really good and gives you self confidence."

Of course, it isn't always easy.

"There's a bit of a period where you might turn a few heads and people are a little bit skeptical [about what you can do]," Barron said. "I kind of just let my

North Delta's Chelsea Barron knows how difficult it can be to be a minority, and hopes she can inspire others to follow their dreams.

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work do the talking for me."

As a woman who hopes to be a mentor for other girls entering the trades, Barron knew that she needed to rise above the "old, old-school mentality" some of her coworkers have about tradeswomen in order to achieve her career goals. But she has another reason she wanted to see her aspirations realized: her grandmother.

Barron's grandmother was a residential school survivor — someone who didn't get a chance to "pursue her dreams and education because of the trauma and abuse that she suffered," Barron said.

Barron never met her grandmother. Barron's mother was put into foster

care as a child, and didn't find her family until she was in her 20s. By then, Barron's grandmother had passed away from leukemia — although stories about her live on through Barron's aunts and uncles.

It's those stories that inspire Barron day after day.

"Just seeing where I am now, being a girl, being Aboriginal, being in a male-dominated industry, I think that's pretty rare," Barron, a member of the Tl'etinqox First Nation, said. "I'd like to inspire other people, if there's others like me out there, to not be afraid of being a minority or singled out as different."

"You have to be strong and willing to just work hard and push through it."


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