

2019 Worthy Women's Professional Studies Scholarship – Finalist Essay

-Susan Billotte

Growing up in a small town in Pennsylvania in the 70's – 80's, the "girls" were not expected to achieve big things. You got married, had children, worked part-time at some meaningless job and took care of your family. I was no different. I married at 18 to a 19 year old that was in the Army. We traveled around for several years. My son was born in Germany. After 7 years of marriage, I was tired of the nomad life. I wanted to raise my son around family. My husband had the opportunity to rotate out of the Army, but against my wishes re-upped. That was the breaking point in our marriage.

So at 25, I became a single mother with no education beyond high school. As predicted, I bounced from meaningless job to meaningless job. After 2 years of this, I decided my son and myself deserved better. I enrolled in a business school, going to school full time and working part-time. God bless my parents for helping with my son. However, I still had 2 years of coming home after 9:00 pm, spending time with my son and putting him to bed. Only then could I start on homework. It was normal to be up until 2:00 am only to wake at 6:00 am to start the cycle over again. The sacrifice was worth it.

My first "big girl" job was working for an accounting firm doing computer support. After 2 years, I moved onto working in the Personnel department for a major retailer in one of their distribution centers. After another 7 years, I finally got a management position working for a senior housing provider.

I went back to school and starting working on my Bachelor's degree. I vividly remember one day I was in a meeting discussing wage budgeting. I was totally prepared. I had all my wage survey research gathered and was giving my reasoning behind the wage increases I was proposing. The senior accountant reached over, patted my knee and said, "Oh honey, you don't understand how all this works." I felt so belittled. It was from that point on that I vowed no one would ever make me feel like I didn't deserve a seat at the table. I finished my B.S. in Organizational Leadership and got promoted to Area Director of Human Resources.

It is now my mission to make the women that work for me live up to their potential. One of my assistants just started working on her Bachelor's in business. My HR Coordinator recently got promoted to Nursing Home Administrator. The HR Coordinator that replaced her is working on her Bachelor's in Healthcare Administration. And I have started working on my Masters in Human Resources. I will never let anyone tell me or anyone that works for me that we "don't understand". I understand what it like to be underestimated and I understand what it is like to be a fierce, confident woman who can rule her own world.