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Why did I decide to further my Education?

My name is Anita Micha-Shields. I am Belgian and I was taken to the Belgian Congo when I was four years old. I was one of four children at that time and while in the Congo my parents expanded their family to eight children. Being five girls and three boys. My father was old fashioned and believed that girls should just grow up, get married and have a family. During that time our family experienced wars, artillery bombardments and saw many atrocities committed right in front of us. That happened three times when our homes and family business was destroyed.

My parents then decided to immigrate to Rhodesia in 1974. However, Rhodesia was experiencing similar problems as we had encountered in the Congo. That fact did not put my father off. He bought a Bakery and French confectionery business out in a mining town in the African bush. This is where I met my future Scottish husband to be. There was an insurgency situation at that time which developed into a full-scale war. I worked as a bookkeeper for the family business. I met my future partner at a Lions Club dance. He worked at the mine as an Engineer. Later, he shares his thought of leaving the mining town and going to a central urban location i.e., Salisbury (Harare now). However, 18 months after moving there, an attack launched by Mugabe’s army in the town at several location. This frighted me so much that my partner’s Ken asked me what I wanted to do, and I responded that my wishes was to leave Africa for good. We then returned to the UK, first to Scotland and then eventually to Northampton. I thought it could not be worse than what I had experienced despite the language barrier.

As soon as I arrived in Northampton I wanted to work. However, very quickly I realised that without a formal qualification my earning potential would be limited.

In 1988, I had the good fortune to do an interim as a Senior Principal Accountant at Northampton County Council. During this interim period, I was asked to apply for the permanent post, and I was successful. After, about two years my Company Director encourage me to pursue my education in Management Studies at Northampton College Park Campus, at Boughton Green Road. These studies would have to be evening classes as I was working full time. I was grateful for the offer. However, I was unsure that I could do it because my English was limited as French was my native language.

Ken encouraged me to “give it a go” as my work colleagues also did the same.

He shared his experiences as a mature student with me as he had studied Engineering at Bristol Polytechnic after leaving the Royal Navy.

I was 40 years old when I started my two years D.M.S. course mixing with others student half my ages. In the beginning it was a bit scary but very quickly I find it exciting. The difference was I had years’ work experiences compared to other students and that make an enormous difference. I shared my knowledge and expertise with them. I was aware that there were some students who were seeking advice only for themselves, but this did not stop me.

In the first year of Management Studies, I did fail in one subject. I recalled I was so upset I was crying. I went to see the lecturer as advised and asked pertinent questions on the subject. Where exactly did I go wrong in my exam. After explaining to me, I re-sat the exam again and this time succeeded with remarkably high mark. During the second and last year of my D.M.S. part of one project was to participate at various workshops and giving a presentation to a pharmaceutical company in Milton Keynes.

During one of these projects, I stood up quickly and the result of it was that I tore a ligament in my knee. I required hospital treatment. The leg plastered; I was wheeled by my fellow students for the rest of the project. Everyone assumed that I would go back home as I was so much in pain. However, I would not hear anything of the sort. I thought I did not come all this way to abandon it all. I was hail as a champion and congratulated by the course Leader and by my fellow students with a bottle of champagne.

From then on, my life change for the better. I study further for a while at Birmingham University at Perry Barr for ACCA. Thereafter, l started my own Accountancy Business until 2000 when it sold. I pursued after that a career in Consultancy to 2010 where I was the Managing Director of a Limited Company until I retired. One of the lessons I to learned is to never give up. I thought if my parents could start three times all over with eight children there was no excuse for me. Also, another advice given by the University was when you consider improving your education there will be people who would resent it. This could be your partner and driving a wedge between you. Or you could have co-worker feeling resentful (This happened with one of them). These are the barriers that you might come across. In my case I had the full support of my partner sharing domestic responsibilities and that make an enormous difference on the outcome.