



## Never the Traditional Girl

by Mellissa Holman

My clock radio turns on, and I hear the voice of the radio DJ telling me it's 6 am. He also reminds me to "WAKE UP" if I haven't already. I lie there for a few moments as he goes on to tell me what happened overnight in Myrtle Beach and that it's going to be 75 degrees and mostly sunny today. I smile.

I find the energy to get out of bed. I let my 6-month-old Lab outside, put the coffee on and head to the shower to get ready for work. After I blow dry my hair, I do my makeup and try to figure out what I'm going to wear to work. This is where my day deviates from the traditional woman's work day. I'm not searching for a dress or a pair of slacks to wear to the office, or a uniform designed for retail or restaurant work... instead a pair of khakis and a T-shirt. The khakis are scarred with black roof tar and frayed at the bottom. The T-shirt is a run of the mill one you can find at most stores. I get dressed, slip on socks and a pair of sneakers, and I'm set for work. What does my work entail? I install solar energy equipment of the new green revolution. I climb ladders, work with tools, crawl in attics and in "crawl spaces" under homes, pull wire, make connections, install inverters, and most days I'm on a 45-foot-tall roof with a securely fastened harness, of course.

I love my job, don't get me wrong. It took me a LONG time to decide what I wanted to do *forever*. I've been working since I was 16 and that was, eh-hem, 14 years ago. I've had all kinds of jobs. I started out like most women my age: I graduated high school and all I knew I wanted to be was a mom. I dated my high school sweetheart until my early 20s and had my entire life planned out, when life sent me that lovely curve ball we all know as a break up. After that, I knew I had to be in a position to take care of myself. I started college, but I changed my major enough times that my adviser knew me by my first name and would ask: "So, what do you want to be this month?" I worked retail, restaurants, did child care, office work, customer service, management and other indoor jobs... You get the idea. My office jobs left me bored and very aware that I'm happiest when I can be busy and physically active. My other jobs just didn't fulfill me. I couldn't make enough money to take care of myself, let alone be able to have the family I've always wanted. And I didn't feel like I was making a difference in the world (which is super important to me).

I grew up in a shore town in New Jersey. My mother is a postal worker. My father is an electrician. And I have an older brother. As a little girl, I always wanted to be involved in everything. If my dad went on a job, I'd go with him, taking in as much information as I could. I would ask 101 questions, and my father would answer every question I threw at him with ease. My mother would get understandably frustrated with me when she would find that I had taken apart the house phone or stereo or VCR just to see how everything worked. But I would always put everything I took apart back together exactly the same way I found it. At 18, my brother was offered a job working at the construction company my father

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had worked for, for 15 years. While he was making great money, I was making minimum wage at our local video store. I would get so frustrated because I wanted the opportunity to prove that I could do that job, too. I could outperform some of those men and make the kind of income that could bring me the security I always wanted. My point is that I come from a very traditional family, but I was never the traditional girl. Women just don't do manual labor (at least not in my family). I had grown up watching all my cousins marry fairly young and start a family right away. I had wanted that, too, but life had other plans for me.

At 28, I was finally given the opportunity to work in the construction/installation field. My father branched out with his business partner and started Solar Plus Energy Pros. I felt as if it were the perfect fit for me, and I was right. I have the wonderfully blessed life of being able to work outside and make a good living. I never get bored. I get to work with different people every day. Most importantly, I'm making a difference for our environment. I get dirty some days and sweaty every day, but I wouldn't change it for anything. People ask me if I still want to get married and have children. My definitive answer is "Yes." It'll just be a bit later. Now I have a job I love, make the money I thought I never would, and I'm taking steps so when I do meet the man who will be my partner, I'll be prepared. I don't think of life as something that needs to be planned out. Everything I've gone through, all the places I've been, the best moments are the ones that just happened. I'm happy, and I truly couldn't ask for more.

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