

— Patricia Poirier Essay —

How many students in this province can say they have seen a man-made hole that is almost 2KM deep and still growing? How many young people in this country can say they see trains running all day long, without conductors? How many young adults in the world can say that they have felt the shock waves of an explosion, and seen its effect on solid rock? How many people have experienced all this, and can turn around and say “it’s all in a days work!” Working with the Iron Ore Company of Canada is a great opportunity for anyone, young or old, but for a student who is really just starting their life, who is still in awe of the wonders of the world, who is still learning about the world, it’s not an opportunity or a job, it’s an experience. I have worked for the company for the last 4 summers and I have been from one end of the project to the other and back again. I have seen and learned things I will never forget, and I have met people that have changed my life. Every summer I’ve been with the Iron ore Company of Canada has been an experience, but none have been as educational and fun as this summer has been. I have never before been this devoted to a summer job. The summer of 2006 has been the best summer work experience I’ve ever had.

This summer I am a labourer on the ATO (Automatic Train Operation). Never have I had a job that offered so much diversity or that has allowed me to see so much of the project. I never know what the day might hold when I head into work in the mornings. I could be doing a variety of different things on any given day. I have worked both inside and outside so far this summer. I have worked outside when it was hot and sunny, and when it was cold and rainy. I have also worked during extremely windy days, and days where the wind was calm and the flies and stouts were out in full force. No matter the conditions though I never complained and was thankful to have the opportunity to work outside. There were days when I helped change rails and clean switches in the pockets underground. Although I could see my breath (which is usually uncommon in Labrador in the summer) I still enjoyed my job and the opportunity to work in a new area. I learned many things working on the ATO. I now know what a railway frog is, and helped to put in a new one. I’ve helped clean switches, change rail and change ties. I’ve driven a number of spikes into the ground, and other days I have driven along the road and picked them up, to prevent flat tires. There were days when I worked in the Ore Car Shop, cleaning locomotives. Although I would spend some nice days in the shop it never really bothered me. Being down there allowed me to meet new people and work in a new place. I had the opportunity to see the inside of a locomotive as an electrician explained many of its functions. It was hard work, and I was tired at the end of the day, but I soon came to enjoy the more physically challenging jobs, and preferred them over the less physical tasks. Overall, my job entails a number of different tasks, in a number of different areas, so I get to see different parts of the project. I am in a new area so I get to learn new things and use new tools that I have never had the opportunity to use before. In other words, every day on the project is an adventure and a learning experience for me. What more could a student ask for?

Any job experience usually entails working alone, as well as with other people. Most big companies are pushing the importance of teamwork, and the Iron Ore Company of Canada is no exception. I really lucked out this summer because not only do I have a fabulous team but I also have great team leaders. Never have I seen people so devoted to their job and so hard working. They have such a good attitude and work ethic, and it’s contagious. Every job is truly a team effort, and even though I’m a student, and not as experienced, I am always asked for input. When the team tackles a job together every person has their say and then we take the best ideas and put a plan into action. Everyone has their specific job, but without everyone working together nothing would get done and the plan would fall apart. The members of my team also include me, even though I can’t always do as much as they can. They will always find a way for me to contribute, and I love that they make me feel useful. I am never excluded from anything, even though I am a student and the only woman on my shift. I am treated as an equal, and this is important to me, especially since I am the only female. My team leaders also don’t expect any less of me just because I am a female. They are constantly challenging me, both mentally and physically. I am energetic and I enjoy being constantly kept busy. My team leaders have continued to keep me busy throughout the day, which I truly enjoy. They have also ensured that I am safe by supplying me with extra PPE and constantly reminding me of the hazards associated with my work area. My supervisors are constantly checking to ensure that I am enjoying my job and that I feel useful. They continuously supply me with feedback when I complete a task, and like the men on my team, my team leaders value my input. I also work with another student and we get along very well. It is nice to have someone close to my age working alongside me as well. He has worked on the ATO before so he has more knowledge of the area and has helped me adjust. When I work down in the Ore Car Shop it is pretty much the same. The men are very hard working and have accepted me as part of their team. In the shop, even though I am not always there, I have taken part in some of their break time rituals. The team leader in the shop is always excited to see me and constantly thanking me for all my hard work. For me, recognition for my work is almost as important as getting paid, so I am pleased when someone notices and comments on the good work I do. The team leader in the shop is constantly recognizing my efforts and congratulating me on a job well done. My family has noticed that I come home with stories and anecdotes from my day, and they can see that I truly enjoy working with my team mates.

Working in mining environment has really changed the way I do things in everyday life. Safety is something that is always emphasized at the Iron Ore Company of Canada and safety is something I take home with me every day. I realized, after working in an industrial setting, that accidents can happen at home, as well as at work. I have already lectured a number of people, mostly family and friends, on various safety hazards in the home. I have also stressed the important of safety when it comes to motor vehicles. No one gets into my car anymore unless there willing to wear their seatbelt. Some people may think I’m being too cautious but working in a mining environment has shown me that injury can occur from even the smallest thing, and a major injury could result from a small hazard. Working on the ATO, where electricity plays a major role, has made me realize how dangerous electricity can be. Whether I’m working around the catenary, with 2400 volts of electricity running through it, or whether I’m changing a light bulb at home, I am now aware of the dangers electricity can pose. Take 5 is a daily thing for me. At work I always stop, pull out my Take 5 booklet and go through my task, even if it’s something I’ve done numerous times. I take 5 so often I can easily rhyme off the 5 steps involved without even looking at my booklet. At home I always stop to assess a situation before proceeding with my task. My team-mates and my team leaders are constantly driving home the point of safety, and I know that safety is something I shouldn’t feel forced to do, but something I should be compelled to do, so that I can pass through the gate every evening in the same shape I was when I entered (except a little dirtier!) I also want my coworkers to be ok when they leave in the evenings, and I know that is partially my responsibility too. My safety consciousness is mostly due to the excellent and extensive training I have received, both prior to starting at the beginning of the summer and on the job training I have received. Before starting work this summer I learned about fall prevention and protection, electrical hazards, environmental hazards and other hazards on the project. When I began work I learned about the specific hazards associated with my area. With every new job that arose my coworkers and team leaders made me aware of new hazards associated with that job. Again Take 5 came into play, and my coworkers and team leaders would help me complete mine by telling me of hazards that I may not be aware of. Training became invaluable in helping me stay safe, and ensure that my coworkers were safe as well. Working in a mining environment has really opened my eyes to safety, at work and at home.

Working in a mining environment has given me a learning experience beyond anything. I could be taught in school. I have learned about machinery, equipment and tools that you wouldn’t find in any household. It amazes my roommates how handy I’ve become since I’ve worked with the company, they still can’t figure out how I managed to fix our toilet with a safety pin! My roommates are excited for my return so they can see what new things I’ve learned this summer (I believe some things in our house need to be fixed, and that’ really why their excited for me to come back!) I’ve taken on projects in my house here in Labrador West as well. I was very excited to paint our deck because it allowed me to work outside, which I now love to do. I enjoy being able to help out around the house, and I owe it to my experience working in a mining industry.

Driving in spikes all summer has vastly improved my aim (although my team-mates on the softball field may not agree), and I am definitely much stronger. I enjoy knowing that during the winter months I have the chance to expand my mind, but in the summer I can work in a physically challenging environment, and still learn at the same time. Some people don’t enjoy doing labour work, but I really enjoy it. You really feel like you’ve earned your pay when you come home at the end of the day tired, but happy. I’ve come home with blisters on my hands and have gotten out of bed with sore muscles, but that’s how I know I worked hard. I may leave tired and dirty at the end of the day, but it’s always with a smile on my face. Having to work as hard has boosted my energy outside of work as well. I wake up most days with an excess amount of energy that has not gone unnoticed by my family and friends. I am looking forward to returning to school with my newfound energy, which I can now apply to my studies.

Many young people aren’t very interested in living in the town they grew up in, or working at the same place where a parent has worked. After this summer I would be proud to work at the company that my father has worked at for many years, and proud to live in this community. I am currently working on a business degree and would love to put my education to use with the Iron Ore Company of Canada. I think I would enjoy taking my education and my experience and combining it to be able to give back to the company, and community, that have given me so much. Whether or not I do end up working for the Iron Ore Company of Canada, I know that the experience I have gained this summer will aid me in any of my future endeavours. No matter where I work I’m sure my experiences from this summer will help me to further my career in any industry, no matter where it should be. Although I’m not sure what the future holds, I know that a career with the Iron Ore Company of Canada, or in the mining industry, would prove to be an amazing opportunity.

My summer has been excellent, due mostly to the Iron Ore Company of Canada and the experience they have given me. I have been given a chance that not everyone has. Not only have I made enough money to go back to school and continue my education, but I have also been given an experience that will aid me in my future endeavours. I take my job very seriously, and work hard and safe every day, but this does not mean that I don’t have fun. I have met some terrific people and learned some interesting things and am a better person because of it. No matter what my future holds I know I will be successful because of the education I have received and the things I have experienced this summer. I owe many thanks to the many people with the company that I have worked with the summer, my coworkers, my team leaders and the people who gave me the opportunity to work at the Iron Ore Company of Canada. I’m sure I will be able to take my summer experiences and apply it to my school work, as well as to any future job I may have. I may not remember everything I did this summer, but I will never forget the experience that I am taking away from my summer. As I said before, the summer of 2006 was the best summer I ever had.