

My career path is very long and winding. My first job (that continues today) is as a farmer's daughter at the Fruit Wagon my parents' farm, growing fresh market fruits, veggies and flowers, as well as commercial apples. I studied Human Kinetics at the University of Guelph where I was a full time student-athlete (rowing) and held down a great job working for the Department of Athletics at Guelph. I've worked as a full-time rowing coach in British Columbia and Wales, UK. My most formative work experiences were those working in First Nations communities across Canada's north. I've worked in hydroponics research with OGVG and Agri-Food Canada as well as extensive work in the wine industry in the beautiful Lake Erie North Shore DVA. 5 Years ago, I started Farm Dog Cycles – a bicycle rental and tour company here in Harrow, Ontario – with my husband Liam Brennan. We do guided wine tours by bike, self-guided tours, bicycles rentals. I'm also a full-time French Immersion teacher in the public school board and I'm currently enjoying maternity leave with our first daughter.

Tell us about your role and what your "typical day" looks like.

The best part about owning your own business is that you get to do everything and my days change with the seasons. (The worst part about owning your own business is that you get to do everything!) On any given summer day, I'm answering emails & the phone, booking tours, delivering bikes, guiding tours, arranging guides, liaising with our partners (wineries, accommodations, etc.) This summer I had time off of guiding which was a welcome break, but I missed it by the end of the season. It's draining, but presenting our amazing region; talking about wine, agriculture, culture, viticulture, architecture, etc is what I really love. It touches all the same elements as what I love about classroom teaching, but I get to do it outside on my bike! In the winter, I look after bookkeeping, we attend consumer shows, advertising – most of the behind-the-scenes work is done by February – long before our "real" season begins. I sometimes get to speak about our part in the Tourism sector within Tourism & Economic Development.

How do you define personal success? What steps do you take to get there?

Every day is made up of dozens, or maybe even hundreds of touchstones – where you have 5 minutes to establish a mini-relationship through an interaction. If, at the end of day, you tally them up and the good ones outweigh the bad, that's success. I do my best to notch some good ones for others. No one gets it right 100% of the time.

What's the biggest professional/personal challenge you've had to face? And what did you learn from that experience?

My biggest challenge is always finding balance. I think the line is "Family, Friends, Work, Sleep, Fitness – Pick 3," and I never pick. Instead, I try to combine. My fitness is my cycling community – which in the summer makes up the most of our friends. Family and Work tie in closely as our business is based right on the farm, where we can try to help out and be helped out. I prioritize sleep over everything!

Who is (or has been) your biggest influencer/mentor? What have you learned from them?

Although I didn't realize it until embarrassingly late in my short life, my mum (Leslie Huffman) has been my biggest influencer. In her career she was passionate and engaged (she hasn't disengaged even now in her retirement,) she always treats others as equals, and always speaks positively. She survived raising four daughters. She is tireless. I take a lot of pride in my household environmentalism; native species gardening, hand-crafting and doing it yourself, fixing instead of replacing, line-drying laundry... my mother was doing all of this in the 80s, and now it's seen as revolutionary! Her memory is unparalleled, and she is amazingly well-read and thoughtful. She instilled the value of critical thinking – not being critical as it is increasing being used – but how to read between the lines, use the scientific method, honour facts and value truths.

If I was to speak directly to my business, I must also give credit Lynnette Bain, VP at Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island. She has been an amazing cheerleader for us, and she is a professional powerhouse without missing out on an ounce of fun.

How has the role of women in agriculture changed throughout your career?

In the Agrotourism/Tourism sector, I would say that women are very well-represented. I think this may be that as a relatively new and growing part of the industry, no one had to displace any men in traditional roles – we've made it our own from the start.

Learning from our mistakes is an important, but sometimes tough, part of life. In the spirit of these profiles helping others, are you willing to share a mistake you made but taught you something important?

I go through life pretty quickly; most of my million mistakes have been made through carelessness or for the sake of saving time. I'm usually fine with it if I end up looking silly, but I take it very hard if it somehow affects anyone else. I will wake up in the middle of the night sometimes years later worrying about how that might have hurt them. It's worse/easier to do with technology. Always triple-check Reply vs Reply to All!!

What's the most burning question for you right now in your career (that you think AWN members might be able to provide answers to or advice on)?

I love talking about political issues; I'd love to know more about encouraging discussion about SUCH important topics without falling into political gutters. I'm a terrible conversationalist in generally – when I go to meetings or conferences, I love to be a wallflower – even though I am usually very outgoing – I'm a professional talker!! How to do you strike up a meaningful conversation in situations like that?

How do you define agriculture?

Technically, I was raised in horticulture – so when I hear agriculture that's what immediately envision. To me, we are the stewards of the earth – no one has their hands deeper in the earth than

farmers. Horticulture is vibrant and it is growing – I love talking about the local food movement to our clients and I think that will be key in educating consumers, who in turn will be our biggest advocates. It's such an easy sell, but I am very careful not to sugarcoat it, or underprice it – I can't stand that. It is important and it is very, very hard work!

What do you feel is a topic in agriculture and/or business that you feel isn't getting enough attention right now?

I'd like to rephrase the question – to emphasize that agriculture isn't getting enough attention in schools right now. Education is the key to keep the industry growing – and educating teachers is an important part of that!

What solutions, tools or processes do you think could be put in place to help advance Canadian women and specifically Canadian women in agriculture?

When you think about it, we are barely a generation out of having women in the workplace at all, so the things that will have the biggest impact on the lives of women working in any industry will be policy changes to support families and childcare especially. I heard an interesting discussion on the radio (I'm a radio/podcast junky) about the effect of suburbs on the downfall of the "village effect." Because I was a WORKING WOMAN for the better part of 10 years before I had a child, my day to day village has always been my co-workers – I miss that so terribly! I live in the country – as do many working in Agriculture – and although I am exactly where I belong, it can be very isolating. Although I haven't had too much opportunity to personally engage with AWN, this network of women is a great initiative towards that support we need.

Do you have a piece of advice for young women starting their career in agriculture?

My only advice is that if something makes you think twice; if you are having a difficult time accepting or making a change; trying a new role; something sounds difficult, scary; DO IT! It will change you for the better. Say Yes to things that are scary and to things you never thought you would do – nothing in life and work is linear – and every experience, even if it is very hard or even seems like a failure in the end will make you a better employee and a better person.